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Negotiating scripts for meaningful sexuality:

An ethnography of youths in The Gambia

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Thesis submitted to the University of London for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2008

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Abstract

Sexuality is an ambivalent concept with multiple layers of meaning, touching upon diverse aspects of individual and social meaning-making systems. The nuances embedded within emic interpretations and appreciations of sexuality are shaped by complex contextual factors. Based on thirty months of ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis describes and analyses how youths in The Gambia negotiate meaningful sexualities in their day-to-day lives; thereby generating a grounded theory about their sexual scripts.

The researcher's theoretical positioning is social construction: combining sexual scripting theory, symbolic interactionism, and critical social theories drawn from post-colonialism, African feminism, post-modernism (deconstruction). These theories informed the research design, and the lens through which interpretations were made, instead of being 'grand' theories backing the study.

Based upon the grounded theory approach, the study investigated emic perspectives on sexuality, and explored lay frameworks of explanation(s) for ordinary performances of things locally labelled 'sexual'. Research methods triangulated ethnographic participant observation, qualitative semi-structured individual interviews, focus group discussions, participatory rapid assessment techniques, literature review. The researcher – a female Ugandan medical-anthropologist – was the main instrument of data generation. The research design was premised upon a feminist paradigm. The data collection process was highly flexible and responsive to contextual findings in the field. The analysis was largely inductive.

Performances of youth sexualities in The Gambia were largely reflective of the main youth subcultures. Each subculture prescribed specific elements for its dominant sexual script. I suggest these youths negotiate five categorisations of sexual scripts:

- 1) Crescent script based on Islamic ethos,
- 2) Condom script based on biomedical sexual and reproductive health,
- 3) Cupid script based on Western notions of falling in love, romance and individual will,
- 4) Cultural-precedence script based on a reified notion of tradition - enacted within ethnic groupings, and supporting gerontocratic dictates,
- 5) Commoditisation of sexuality for exchange.



Dedication

*I have to speak you see:
Speak because I almost can't
Speak because so many haven't
Speak in whatever language I know
And not fear walking on my own fire.
Speak I must
Because I was almost silenced.
I speak simply because I am here
When I'm gone
I'm leaving words and tracks behind...
Barry (2004)*

I dedicate this thesis to Ousman Bah, with whom I found my sexual self.

Stella Nyanzi, September 2008

Acknowledgements

In building a home, certain specialists are needed to make the structure complete. Their time may be minimal and their contribution small, yet they are a part of the construction of that home. In the same way, certain people come into our lives at various times who help make or break our perspective. Maxwell (1993:55-56)

Writing this thesis was often lonely. It was also exciting, frustrating, challenging, fulfilling, confidence building, and a test of my very substance. It touched me to the core, dashed all self-importance and self-reliance. It restored my firm belief in the support of others. My mother, sisters - Susan, Barbara and Sheila, were strong buffers of support. 'Mummy, I did this for me – but I hope it will put more bounce in your step, raise your head a notch higher, add more light to the glow in your eyes, and make your load lighter.' My husband, daughter and twin sons were priceless bye-products of my PhD. My father's persistent demand of his children for only high standards of excellence, his example of hard work, disciplined commitment to goals, and strategic planning were an ever-present beacon as I plodded along the road of producing the chapters.

Robert Pool - my supervisor, taught me to fish and then trusted me enough to take me out into deep waters, leave me there, and require me to return home with a big catch. Whenever I touched base, he was there, silently cheering me. My academic career would be very different had he not accepted to mentor me. Perhaps my doctorate would not be. When I was kicked in the teeth, he taught me to smile again.

The Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Programme funded my PhD studies. Research funds were supplemented by grants from Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and Council for Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA). The many Africans, with whom I networked under CODESRIA's umbrella, rekindled the passion within me to carry the baton of academic fire infused with the lived realities of African peoples. The beautiful bold brainy African feminist sisters I met at the African Gender Institute (AGI) sharpened the critical

cutting edges of my thought and writing; edges otherwise running blunt and rusty from the hefty load of patriarchy continuously thrust upon my feeble bronze back.

The Gambian National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) gave me a four-year research permit, opened up administrative doors for my research, which other councils had threatened to keep shut. My multiple Gambian families – through adoption, patronage, marriage, tenancy and friendship, variously facilitated my research team and me during fieldwork. I appreciate all the Gambian citizens, residents and nationals who opened their doors to me, shared their lives, and allowed me to analyse their performances of life, personhood and sexuality. My thesis would not be without them.

Jerrengen jef! Alabaraka baake! Onjarama nobete!

While acknowledging the above support, I also take all the responsibility for starting, doing, completing, submitting and defending this doctorate project. In case there are any mistakes, errors, or faults, I alone am responsible for these.

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Chapter 1: The study – background, setting and methods

I think metaphorically of qualitative research as an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colours, different textures, and various blends of material. This fabric is not explained easily or simply. Like the loom on which fabric is woven, general frameworks hold qualitative research together. To describe these frameworks, we use terms – constructivists, interpretivists, feminists, methodologists, postmodern thinkers, positivists “with a heart”, naturalistic researchers. Broader yet are the traditions of inquiry that overlay the frameworks and the studies. We conduct an ethnography, we engage in developing a grounded theory, or we explore an unusual case. With the complexity of qualitative research, its terms, and its traditions, what common ground exists for qualitative research? Cresswell (1998:13)

The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and ultimately, to its conclusions. Yin (1989:28)

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research processes upon which my thesis is founded. The first section includes a statement of the research problem, the rationale, aims, and objectives of the study. Then I discuss my theoretical positioning. The third section discusses grounded theory and ethnography – the methodological approaches I adopted. This is followed by a synopsis of the study context. In the last section, I discuss my methods of data collection, processing and analysis, ending with some ethical considerations.

1.1.1 Statement of the problem

Diverse socio-cultural groups respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in different ways. While social science research in sub-Saharan Africa has tended to focus on the impact of local sexual behaviour and attitudes on the high levels of HIV/AIDS, scanty attention has been given to detailed in-depth studies about how the pandemic has affected socio-cultural behaviour. What is available focuses on assessing sexual behaviour change as a result of blue-print 'cookie cutter' public health interventions (Nguyen and Stovel 2004). There specifically exists a paucity of qualitative research-based literature about how Gambian youths are reorganising the meanings they bring to and make from their sexualities in response to the epidemic. There is a gap in the literature about youths' perceptions of the sexual options available to them. Further compounding the problem is the persistence of a narrow focus restricted to biomedical renderings of the sexual terrain, and thus a limited appropriation of **sexuality** in efforts to intervene in the lives of youths (see Nyanzi 2006, Boyce et al. 2006).

1.1.2 Rationale of the study

Youths are the target of diverse sexual and reproductive health interventions. There is a need to investigate lay appreciations and interpretations of sexuality in the light of massive international health programmes and policies to combat growing rates of HIV/AIDS. In order to design interventions that are effective and appropriate within specific local settings, in-depth investigations of the landscape of sexuality are critical. As youths adapt diverse individual and social mechanisms of meaning-making and coping with their sexual selves in an era of HIV/AIDS and its drastic effects, new youth sub-cultures emerge. This study investigated the processes and outcomes of Gambian youths' negotiation of socially acceptable sexuality, sexual behaviour and meaningful reproductive health outcomes in the face of HIV/AIDS. By contrasting the socially scripted from the enacted versions of youth sexualities, the meanings prioritised by

youths were elucidated. Priority was given to drawing out the emic view of Gambian youths going through these processes and experiences.

1.1.3 Aims of the study

The aim of the study was to make an empirically grounded contribution to discussions about contemporary African youth sexualities.

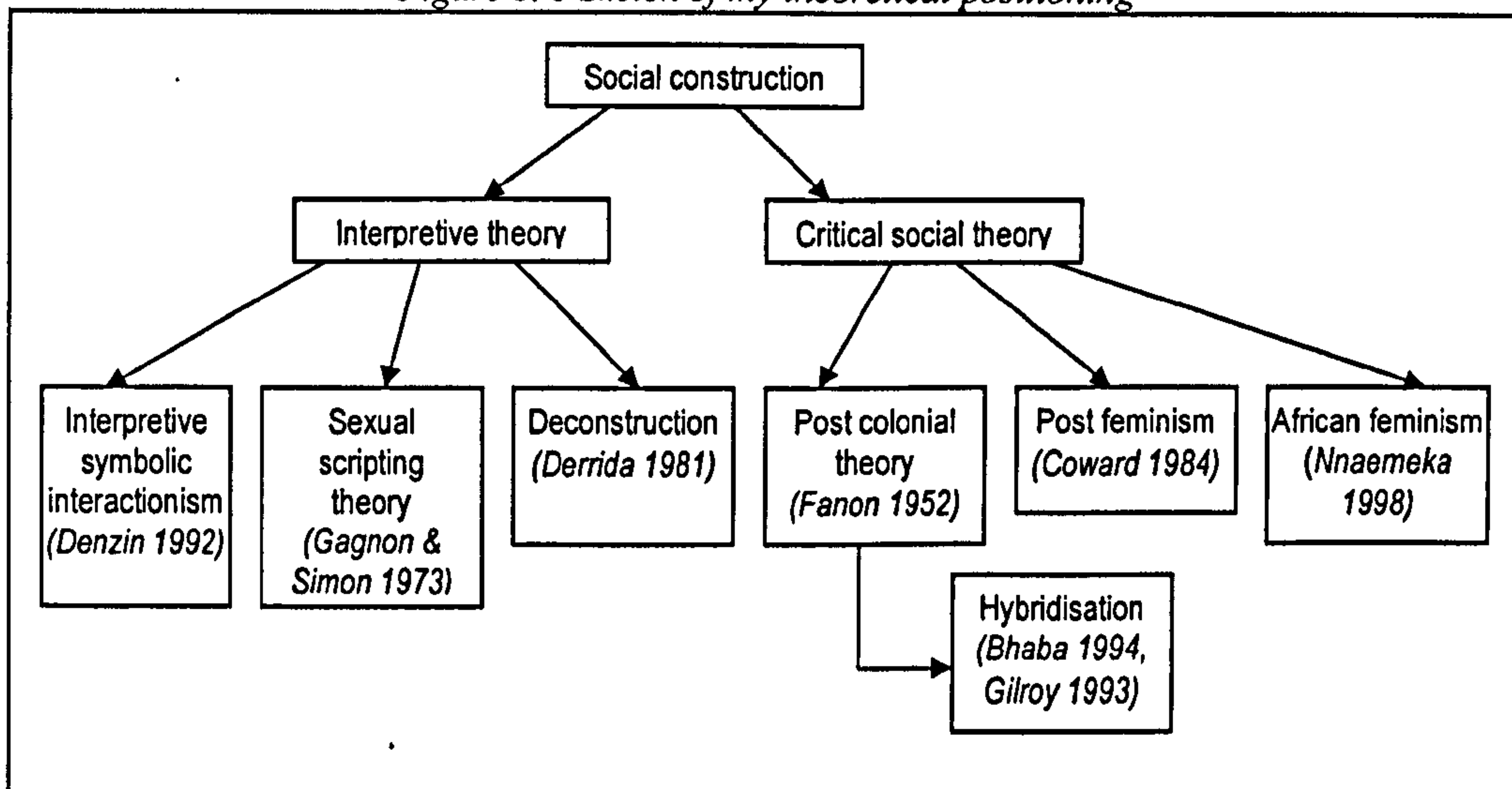
1.1.4 Objectives of the study

1. To review literature about youth sexualities in sub-Saharan African generally, specifically dwelling on The Gambia.
2. To ethnographically explore youth sexualities in The Gambia, focussing on emic meanings, perspectives and experiences.
3. To generate grounded theory about meaningful sexualities among today's youths in The Gambia.

1.2 Theoretical positioning

It is contrary to my theoretical positioning within a social constructivist paradigm, to zero down on a particular body of theories prior to fieldwork. However, I extensively read around and considered the possibility of combining elements of interpretive theory with critical social theory. In the light of findings during the proceeding phases of fieldwork, the theoretical framework for the study was broadly informed by interpretive symbolic interactionism (Denzin 1992, 1989, 1990, Brown 1989, Richardson 1990a, b), sexual scripting theory (Gagnon and Simon 1973, Lewis and Kertzner 2003), deconstruction (Derrida 1981, Norris 1983, Sarrup 1988, Culler 1982, Gergen 1999), post-feminism (Coward 1984, 1993, 1999, Whehelan 1995), post-colonial theory (Bhabha 1994, Dayan 1996, Gilroy 1993).

Figure 1. 1 Sketch of my theoretical positioning



For descriptions of these theories, see appendix 8.

1.3 Methodology

The methodology combined grounded theory approach and ethnography.

1.3.1 Grounded theory approach

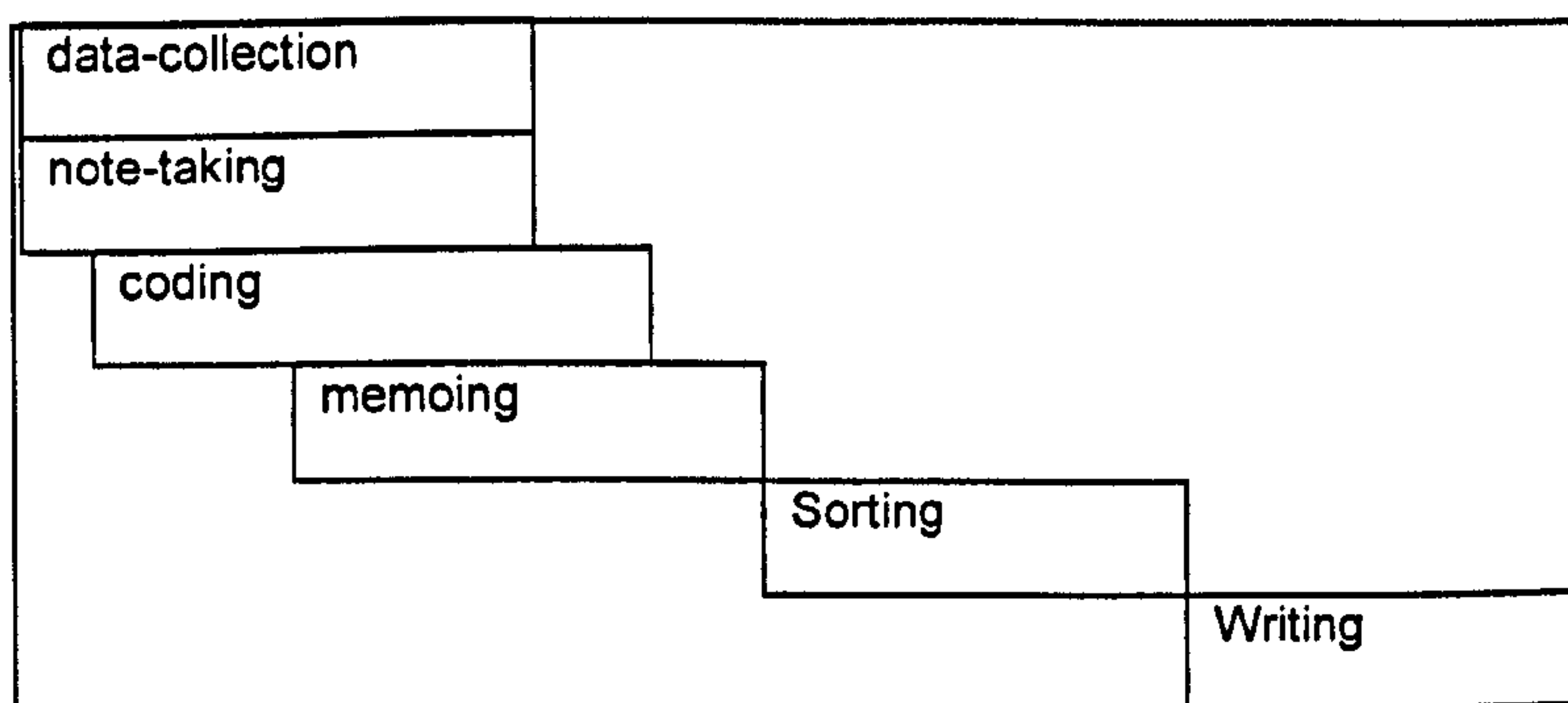
The study was based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), which emphasises the inductive generation, elaboration and validation of theory inherently grounded within systematically analysed qualitative data (see also Haig 1995). This approach to social scientific inquiry developed as an alternative to more traditional approaches described as ‘...the prevalent hypothetico-deductive practice of testing “great-man” sociological theories...’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967:7,10) which heavily relied upon hypothesis testing, verification techniques and quantitative analysis (Babchuk 1997). While the key principles and concepts of grounded theory are outlined in ‘The discovery of grounded theory’ (1967), subsequent publications (Glaser 1978, Glaser 1992, Strauss 1987, Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1997) revealed the establishment of two distinct methodologies (see also Glaser 1992) based on important epistemological and characteristic differences between Glaser’s and Strauss’ application of the theory. In fact Glaser labelled Strauss’ methodology as ‘full conception description’ and not grounded theory.

Major criticisms of grounded theory include ambiguities in application resulting from the apparent disagreements between its initiators (Babchuk 1997, Robrecht 1995), and argument that it signals a return to 'Baconian inductivism' (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Haig 1995, Kinach 1995), lack of clarity, precision and rigour in some research methodology procedures and descriptions (Schatzman 1991, Miller and Fredericks 1999, Allan 2003), and the problems of enormous volumes of data gathered and the space needed to explain the findings or publish, 'complaints about lack of problem definition, no research questions, no hypothesis, no literature review are common...' (Esteve and Pastor 2003). Based on intensive engagement with the relevant literature, my past research experience and the apparently more emergent character of Glaser's application of grounded theory, this study predominantly employed 'the Glaser style' (Dick 2002). Elements of Strauss' application were adapted particularly during the later stages of analysis because of their relevance to computer usage (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

The central components of grounded theory – Glaser style – include constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, coding procedures, interpretive strategies and generation of theories grounded in the data. The data collection, data analysis and hypothesis generation processes are cyclical and interrelated in that each depends on and influences the other (Glaser 1978, Glaser and Strauss 1967, Wells 1995, Robrecht 1995).

Graphically illustrated, a grounded theory research study works through the following mostly-overlapping phases:

Figure 1. 2 Phases of a grounded theory (adapted from Dick 2002)



Data collection, note taking, coding and memoing happen simultaneously from the beginning. Sorting occurs when all categories are saturated.

I specifically chose grounded theory because it provides the structure often lacking in other qualitative approaches, without sacrificing flexibility or rigour (Calloway and Knapp 1995). Consequently the resulting theory is an explanation of embedded categories, their properties and the relationships among them. I needed an approach that would be true to the voices emerging from within the field data.

1.3.2 Ethnography

The research also employed applied/ critical ethnographic methods. Ethnography is both the study of culture, and the written text of ethnographic results (Le Compte and Preissle 1993). Ethnographic fieldwork is the hallmark of cultural anthropology (Spradley 1979, 1980). Le Compte and Schensul 1999, in their 'Ethnographer's toolkit' summarise the major characteristics of ethnographic methodology: 'Ethnography is an approach to learning about the social and cultural life of communities, institutions and other settings that is scientific, investigative, uses the researcher as the primary tool of data collection, uses rigorous research methods and data collection techniques to avoid bias and ensure accuracy of data, emphasises and builds on the perspectives of the people in the research setting, is inductive – building local theories for testing and adapting them for use both locally and elsewhere, and emphasising understanding culture'.

Several scholars have focussed on the crisis facing ethnography both as a methodology and as written text (Ortner 2002, Hammersley 1992, 1990, Tyler 1985, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Clifford 1988, Carr and Kemmis 1986, Atkinson 1989). Although it is the staple research methodology for cultural and social anthropologists, several other disciplines have adopted it (Spradley 1979, 1980, Bernard 1994, Pelto and Pelto 1978, Singer 1990, Trotter and Schensul 1998) resulting in ambiguities and ambivalences in the meaning of the term 'ethnography'. According to Hammersley 1990, 'the meaning of the term overlaps with that of several others

such as “qualitative method”, ‘interpretive research’, “case study”, “participant observation”, “life history method”, ‘ethogenics’, etc.; and these terms are not used in very precisely defined ways either’. In addition, ethnographic methodology is criticised either for not being ‘scientific’ because it does not meet the criteria of positivist quantitative researchers, or that it is ‘too scientific’ in that it has not broken sharply enough with the model of natural science and quantitative research (see Hammersley 1990 for a discussion). The claim that ethnographers’ accounts represent the social reality they study is contested based on an understanding of the research process whereby the ethnographic data are an interpretative production based on researcher participation and thereby constructed in the process of analysis and writing up employing rhetorical strategies (Tyler 1985, Marcus 1988, Clifford and Marcus 1986). In addition, critical theorists criticise ethnography for maintaining the gap between theory (research) and practice (Habermas 1973, 1987), and that it does not advance the ‘emancipatory model’ because it only documents how things are without going further to discover how they might be changed for the better (Hammersley 1990, Carr and Kemmis 1986). This has led to the development of critical or applied or action ethnography in recent times (Le Compte and Schensul 1999). Criticisms of conventional ethnography influenced by feminism and ethnic studies, particularly highlight the masculinist biases, Western ethnocentrism, cultural insensitivities and the fact that it is merely descriptive of situations but does not lead to the empowerment or betterment of women and ethnic minorities. A further criticism concerns the politics of ethnographic research which is facilitated by exploitative power relationships and processes between the ethnographer and the researched.

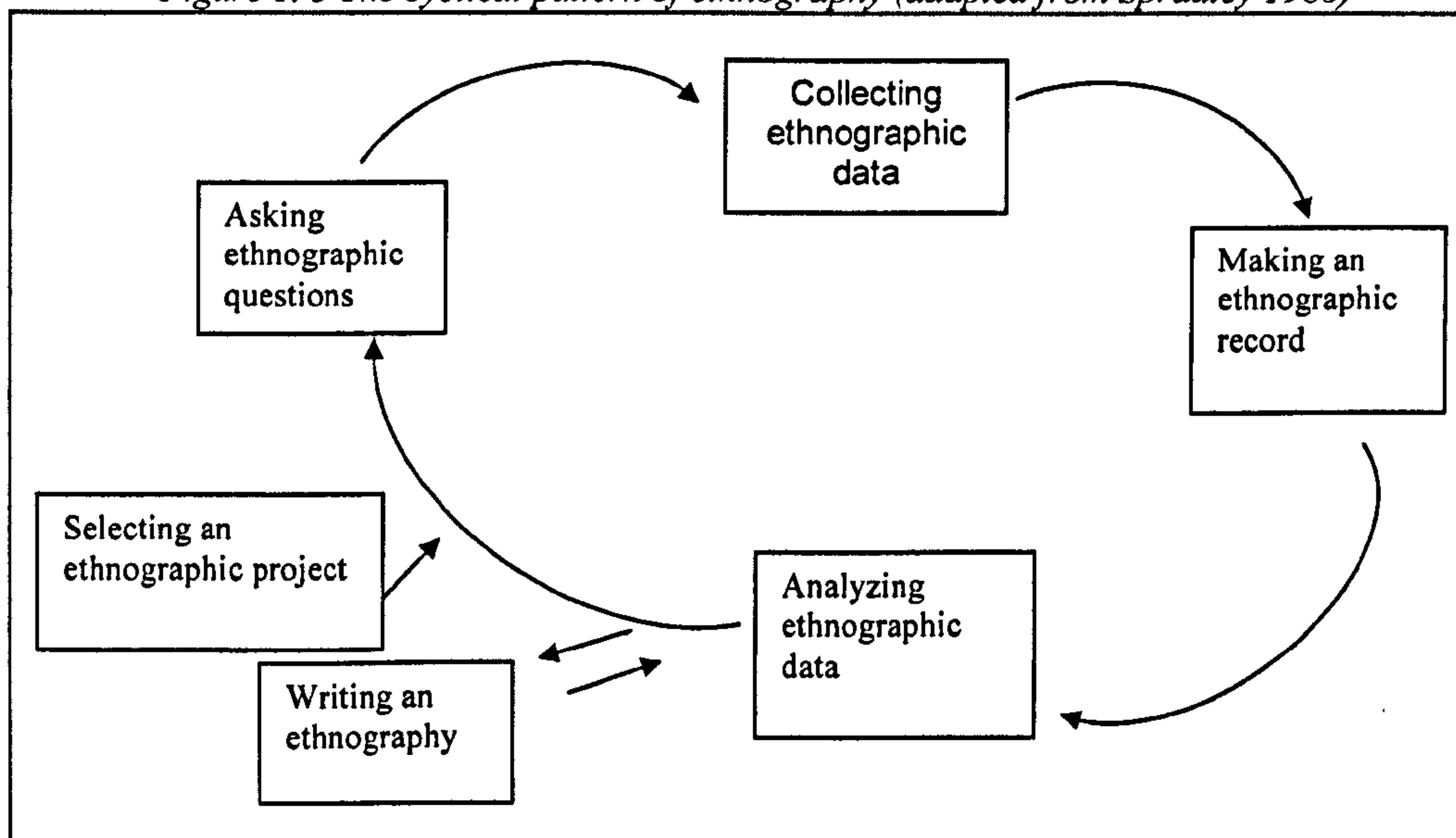
Following from the influence of Robert Pool (1994) and the inspiration of James Spradley (1979, 1980), I considered it to be essential that I lived among the study population, learnt their way of life, and directly observed them firsthand as they went about the business of day-to-day living, because there are differences between what people say, what they say they do and what they actually do. Therefore, ethnographic fieldwork is the foundation of my study.

Justifications for my choice of employing ethnography (even with its shortcomings) include the fact that as a method, it is more suited to the exploration of processual and meaning-laden character of human behaviour (Bruyn 1966, Hammersley 1990, Jenkins and Howard 1992, Le Compte and Schensul 1999), it is idiographic rather than nomothetic, it is interpretative rather than merely observational, it appropriately justifies 'naturalism' by advocating for fieldwork in a natural setting, its methods bring out the emic view, and its operational framework is compatible with implementing the grounded theory approach (see also Spradley 1979:11-12), social constructionism, symbolic interactionism and critical theory.

Ethnography is particularly relevant to unpacking the intersections between youth sexualities and available power structures as represented by relevant social and health policies (see Harvey 1990). After exploring the meanings of sexuality and health among the youths, the analysis progressed to linkages with wider social structures and systems of power relationships. Critical ethnography facilitated me to situate meanings and social processes that were evident among the youths, within wider social, political, economic, or other structures.

Akin to grounded theory methodology, ethnography follows a cyclical pattern of operation (Spradley 1980) as graphically illustrated below.

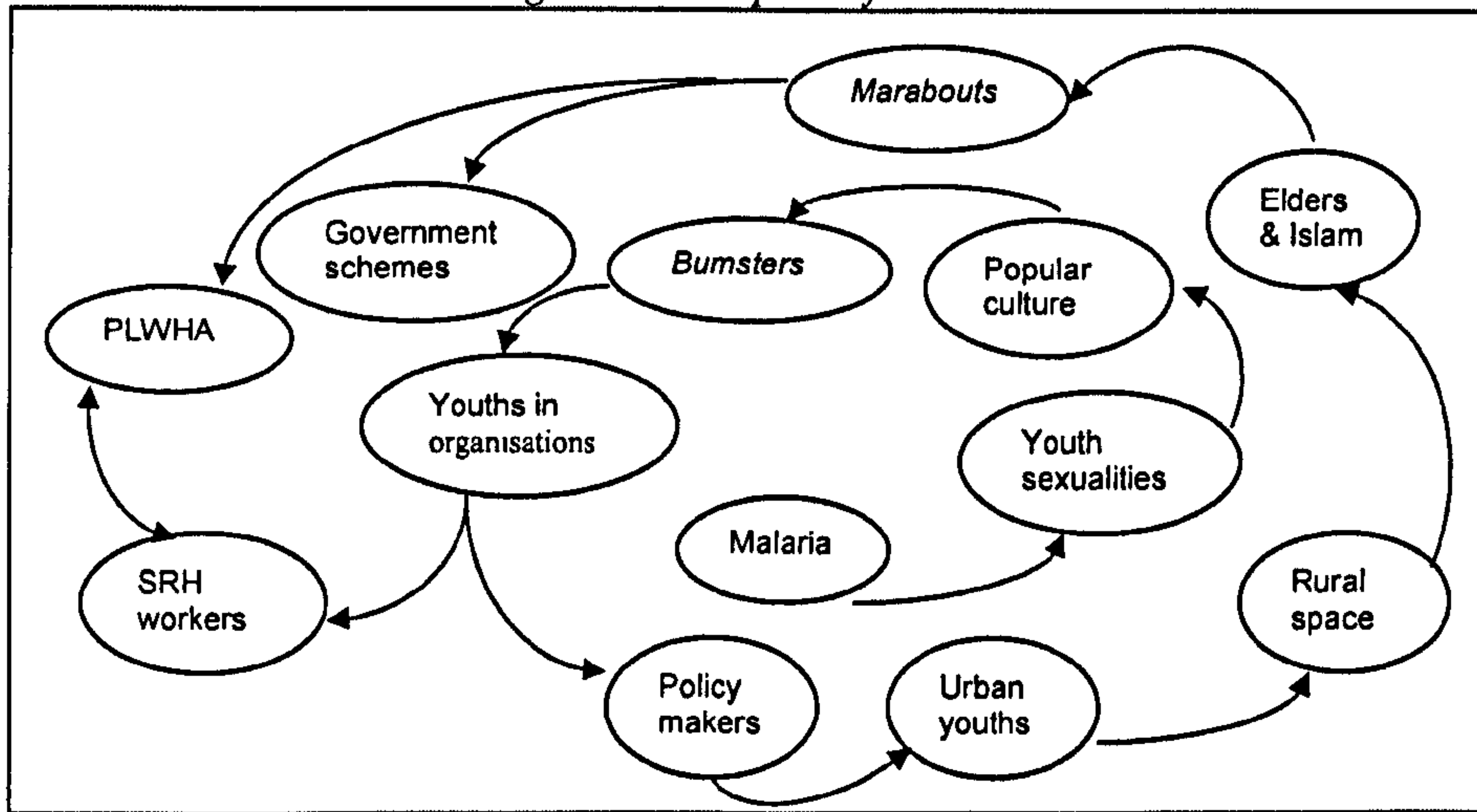
Figure 1. 3 The cyclical pattern of ethnography (adapted from Spradley 1980)



1.3.2.1 Questions from questions: charting my ethnographic cycle

As illustrated below, my research focus on sexualities of youths passed through a number of analytical categories in response to findings in the field (see appendix 12 for a detailed discussion). Each research cycle opened up a chain of new research questions which needed answering in order to gain a better nuanced understanding of the main research problem. During the period I was in the field, I investigated diverse angles of the youth sexualities' questions – each related to the preceding and subsequent ones. During ethnography fieldwork about malaria prevention and treatment in North Bank division, I observed interesting dynamics and contradictions in youth sexualities. I thus proceeded with ethnographic inquiries into related social phenomena ranging from popular culture, sex tourism, youth organisations, youth policy, the role of Islam and Islamic guides, available programmes, etc.

Figure 1.4 The path I followed



1.3.3 Study setting and sampling

The Gambia, the smallest and one of the most densely populated countries on the African continent, sometimes considered a toothpick down Senegal's throat or a finger up Senegal's ass because of its bizarre geographical location... ' Starin (2007a:207)

Stretching into West Africa from the Atlantic Coast, The Gambia has a projected population of 1.5 million people (Central Statistics Department 2004) which is mostly (95%) Muslim. The capital city is Banjul. It is multi-ethnic, the most common ethnic groups being Mandinka, Wollof, Fula. Gambians are culturally similar to several groups of other West African peoples, due to pre-colonial social organisation. For example many Gambian families have kinsmen in neighbouring Senegal, Mauritanie, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Guinea Conakry, etc.

Figure 1.5 Map of The Gambia

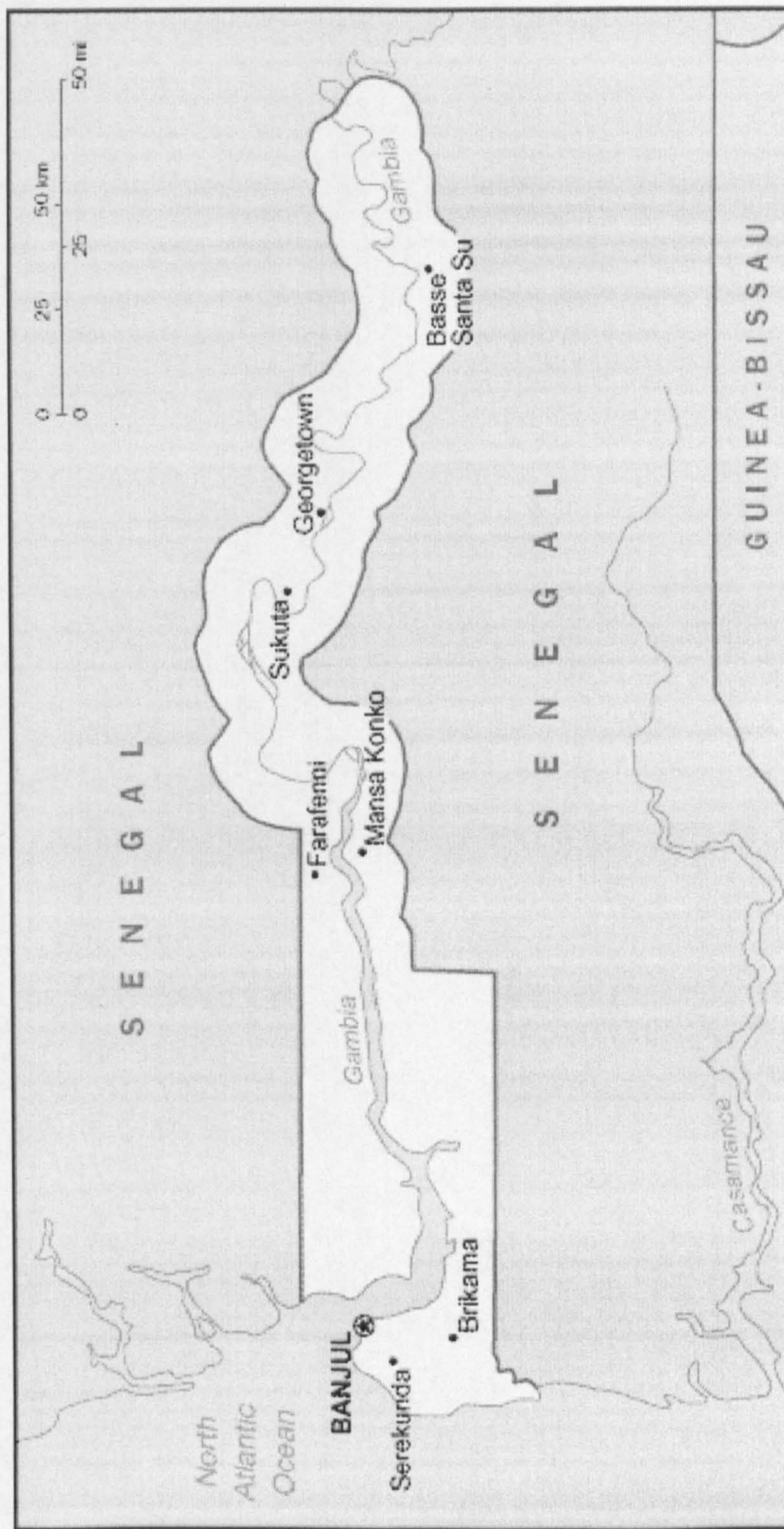


Figure 1.6 Arch 22 in Banjul



The Gambia gained her independence from British colonisers in 1965. She has had two presidents: Dawda Jawara who ruled from 1965 to 1994 when Yahya Jammeh took over through military coup (Edie 2000, Saine 2003, 2002, Wiseman 1998). Her economic mainstay is agriculture (mainly groundnuts), followed by tourism (Dieke 1994, Sallah 1990). 82.9% of the population live on less than US\$2 a day (UNAIDS 2007).

Pursuing various threads of my ethnographic research took me to study sites representing the urban, coastal, peri-urban and rural provinces. I lived either as a tenant, daughter, wife, visitor or employee, in all these areas for extended periods of time.

1.3.3.1 Synopsis of the study locations¹

Figure 1.7 Summary of study cites

Characteristic of composite study sites		
<i>Location</i>	<i>Spatial character</i>	<i>Dominant youth sub-culture(s)</i>
Banjul ²	Urban capital	Urban, students, idle school-drop-outs, micro-entrepreneurs, civil servants, elitist
Farafenni town	Peri-urban border-town	Students, early school-drop-outs, petty traders
Tallinding - Kujang	Peri-urban slum	Students, petty traders, service providers, idle school-drop-outs
Kotu	Coastal residential	Students, female home-makers, wealthy parents
Senegambia	Coastal touristy	Beach boys, <i>chaggas</i> , tourist entrepreneurs
Jeriko Wollof	Rural (hamlet)	Wollof, peasants, students, married youths
Yallal - Tankonjala	Rural (hamlet)	Fula, peasants + nomads, students, married youths
Illiasa	Rural (PHC village)	Mandinka, peasants, students, married youths
NYSS	Government organisation	Out-of-school youths getting skills
LAHS	Non-government organisation	Capable students from poor backgrounds.
SYSS	PLWHA support society	Youths infected with HIV or having AIDS

Due to the comparative premise of the study design, and in response to preliminary findings in the field, youths were conveniently sampled from the main youth sub-cultures which corresponded with their locality. As figure 1.7 illustrates, youths were chosen to represent the three main ethnic groups – Mandinka, Wollof and Fula. They were from four social spatial

¹ The ethnographic cycle led me into different study cites and youth sub-cultures. As I retrospectively considered the wisdom of locating the fieldwork in diverse spaces, I came across Furstenberg's (2000:904) assertion based on an extensive review of literature on adolescents and youths: 'Some other limitations of the current literature are equally apparent. Researchers have been much more attentive in looking at adolescence in single rather than in multiple contexts. Most studies focus on the influence of families or schools or peers or neighbourhoods; only recently have investigators begun to examine multiple contexts in a single study design. If we are to gain a more complete understanding of when, how, and why different contexts shape the trajectories of development, we cannot continue to study one context at a time.'

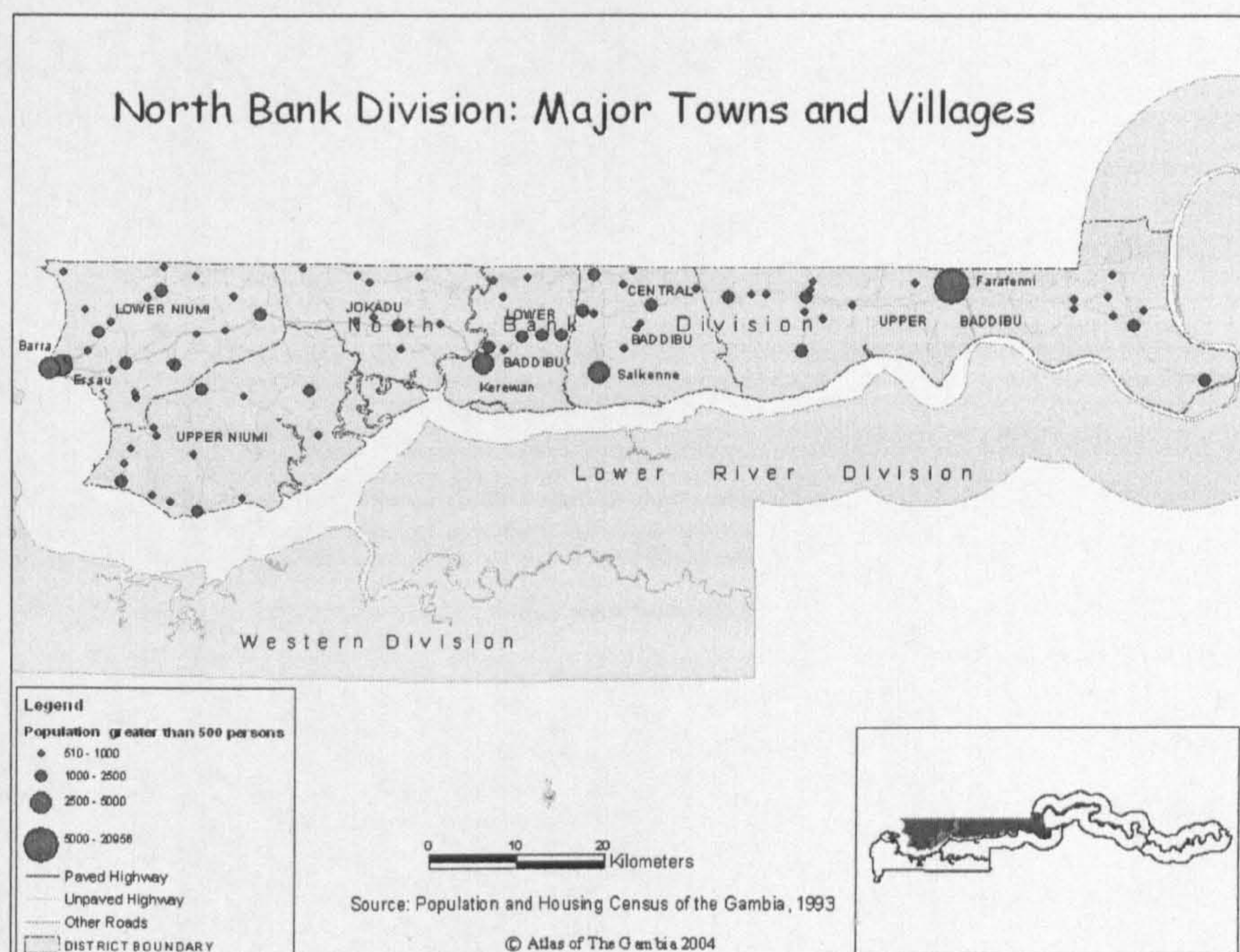
² In the first version of this thesis I did not describe the locations in order to protect the study participants from potential identification, - a requirement of the ethics review board. However, I now include this information in response to the examiners who reasoned, it is not 'necessary to pseudonymise the villages researched – to protect whom? The police will know them, as will anyone else who's seriously interested'.

divides, namely the urban capital, urban peripheries, touristy coastal, and provincial rural³. While the specific urban cites were chosen in response to findings about particular youth subcultures and sexual cultures situated therein, I relied on advice from the DHT in Farafenni about selecting villages. Because The Gambia has been a research site for diverse studies of the MRC since 1947, communities that participate in their activities suffer research fatigue (Shaw and Jawo 2000, Nyanzi et al. 2007).

In addition to these fixed localities where fieldwork was conducted, the anthropologist (and her assistants) also maintained her membership in households in Dibba Kunda Fula as an adopted daughter, Samba Soto as an apprentice and friend, in Sankalang Wollof where the Alkalo jokingly referred to her as 'wife', and in Berending as an observer of a Grand Marabout. Because I was a member of these communities, on their own terms, which were not necessarily tied into research, I sometimes felt that people were less rehearsed in their interactions with me. Consequently I was able to tap into local performances that occurred perhaps less as a result of my prompting or directing. I find that I learnt considerably about local etiquette, procedure and protocol in these environments. Therefore I intersperse my interpretations of the data collected with insights garnered in these spaces. In fact, it is debatable whether I can tell for certain the distinct Gambian spaces in which I was socialised about the vast array of local performances and meanings of youth sexualities.

³ The boundaries between these spaces are very loose, particularly when considered in the light of Gambian youths who characteristically migrate not only from rural to urban settings, but also between both urban and rural spaces in response to subsistence agricultural cycles of sowing, harvest and trade, and the tourist seasons (refs on migration for agriculture, Hunt 1993, Nyanzi et al. 2005).

Figure 1.8 North Bank Division – rural study cites



1.3.3.1a Yallal Tankonjala

Named after a legendary well used by the ancestors of present residents, Yallal-Tankonjala⁴ is predominantly a settlement for Fulas. Commuting to and from was relatively easy for me because she straddles the Barra-Farafenni highway. I often took a *gelegele* from Farafenni for 15 *dalasis*, particularly when I lacked access to the DHT pick-up truck. It was common for me to find Demba

⁴ Although people commonly shorten it to Yallal, I retain the full name otherwise the site cannot be distinguished from other Gambian villages that start thus including Yallal Ba (Kerr Dekumba) in Lower Baddibu district, Yallal Ba in Sabach Sanjal, and Yallal (Kerr Mari) in Lower Niumi.

Bah, the grandfather of the Alkalo – Sarjo Bah, relaxing and lying in the village-*bantaba* just by the road. An elderly stout light-skinned Fula man, Demba Bah was my first contact and main gate-keeper in Yallal Tankonjala. And I drew upon my daughter-ship in Alkalo Pateh Bah's household, as a basis of relationship with the Fulas in Yallal Tankonjala (see also Jassey 2005, Ebron 2001 about the relatedness of Gambians). They accepted me as one of their own, because they knew Pateh Bah, and some of his extended relatives married into and bore children for this village.

The village is situated in Illiasa constituency of Upper Baddibu District of North Bank (East) Division⁵. The population in the 1983 census was 361, and rose to 515 in the 1993 census; indicating a growth rate of 3.617%. Thus when this fieldwork started in 2003, the projected population was 735 (http://www.dosh.gm/hmis/Population_db.xls)⁷. According to the Alkalo, Yallal Tankonjala is composed of about fifty compounds.

There is no health centre in Yallal Tankonjala. Rather, it has a village health worker - Kebba Bah whose mobile phone⁸ was strategic to my planning and coordination of fieldwork. He is supported by two traditional birth attendants who are trained, supported and officially recognised through the primary healthcare (PHC) system (Nyanzi, Manneh and Walraven 2007, Hill et al. 2000). Furthermore, on every fourth Wednesday each month, a mobile outreach clinic from Illiasa Health Centre treks to Yallal-Tankonjala for routine public healthcare services including child immunisations, antenatal consultation, advice, observations, diagnosis and prescription of

⁵ As a nation, The Gambia comprises Banjul capital city, Kannifing Municipal Council and six administrative divisions: Western, North Bank West, North Bank East, Lower River, Central River, and Upper River. North Bank East Division has six districts, namely Lower Niumi, Upper Niumi, Jokado, Lower Baddibu, Upper Baddibu and Central Baddibu.

⁶ I present these arguably outdated data and projections thereof because analysis of the 2003 census data was still on-going at the time of submission of the revised thesis.

⁷ I present these arguably outdated data and projections thereof because analysis of the 2003 census data was still on-going at the time of submission of the revised thesis.

⁸ Mobile phones are a symbol of status and class. While most village elders did not own a mobile phone, Kebba mainly had a GAMCEL line. When I returned in 2008, he had complemented this with a new COMIUM line.

first-line drugs, or otherwise for referral usually to AFPRC Farafenni hospital. They also offer health education about diverse topics.

The village has one school called Yallal Tankonjala Basic Primary School, which goes up to Grade 6. This school's physical infrastructure basically comprises two white-washed blocks for classes, a massive field and a house for the headmaster. Students are aged between seven and fifteen years. In April 2008, there were 284 students and 5 teachers. Due to a shortage of schools within the area, students travel from twelve surrounding villages and hamlets namely Daru, Yallal Ba, Chamen, Missira, Jeriko, Wallalan, Mbanta, Yuuna, Kerr Ndongo, Kerr Tali, Jalaba and Yallal Tankonjala. The headmaster, Madiba Singateh reported the challenges of lack of space and insufficient supply of teachers. A pragmatic solution taken was operating the school on a double-shift mode divided into morning and afternoon sessions. Although there is a *dara* run by the village *imam*, the elders in Yallal Tankonjala variously reported that all school-age children in the village attend the formal education system. *Madarassa* education was attended by both girls and boys in the evenings, after formal school, or otherwise during school holidays in the formative years of childhood. The villagers are nominal Muslims: Senegalese brotherhoods did not feature in their religious affiliation. Family Life Education was scheduled twice a week for Grades 4 to 6 and taught in a mix of English and local languages for emphasis, clarity and enhanced comprehension.

The main economic activity is subsistence farming of groundnuts, coos-coos, maize, *naaje*, pumpkins, *banga*, rice. As nomads, these Fula residents also rear cattle often herded far from the village. The biggest challenge reported in all data sources was access to water⁹. There is no electricity. Firewood provides cooking fuel. Lanterns, wax-candles, or torches provide light at

⁹ For the entire span of the study 2003-2008, sourcing water was a big problem that affected social, economic, and political organisation. The different social segments of the village, be it generations, gender, residence status, political position, etc, always talked to me about the possibility of helping them talk to government about providing, supplementing or mending their single water-source – 36 meters' deep with one pipe, but many hand pumps. When I returned in April 2008 I found collective mirth as different villagers decried the highway constructors for closing off a water-pipe they had installed when building the road segment through Yallal Tankonjala. 'Billahi the stopped the water and sealed it off when they were leaving, as if we had also stopped living!' they lamented.

night. Donkey- and horse-carts provide most local transport, with a few households owning bicycles. No one has a car in Yallal Tankonjala. While emigration from the village mainly revolved around trade, urban employment and livelihoods for male youths, it centred on marriage in the case of females – notably marrying into or out of the village (see chapter 4 for a discussion about virilocal marriage organisation).

1.3.3.1b Jeriko Wollof

Situated further inland – forty-five minutes on donkey-cart from the Barra-Farafenni highway, Jeriko Wollof is a hamlet in Illiasa constituency of the North Bank East division. It mainly comprises Wollofs; and thus the distinguishing name from adjacent Jeriko Fula. The naming typology here clearly illustrates Hill et al.'s (2000) descriptions of households in smaller settlements within the North Bank congregating around similar ethnicity.

Data from the 1983 population census are combined for Jeriko Wollof and Jeriko Fula at 491. This aggregate rose to 606 in the 1993 census, giving a growth rate of 2.127%. However separate data are available for the twin villages at 264 and 342 for Jeriko Fula and Jeriko Wollof, respectively. For the two villages, projected population for 2003 was estimated at 748 (http://www.dosh.gm/hmis/Population_db.xls).

The majority religion in Jeriko Wollof is Islam. Central to spatial organisation of the village is a white-washed mosque with deep green binding and an elongated proud tower from which the *muezzin's* call projects through a DD-size battery-powered megaphone. A strategic plot I employed to simultaneously meet plenty of villagers in Jeriko Wollof was timing the end of evening prayers when all the significant elders and gatekeepers congregated in one spot. There I would request for their audience and effectively communicate with those that held sway – hopefully expecting they would disseminate the message to others in their compounds. With the exception of Friday *juma* prayers, joint prayers at the mosque were mainly attended by elders and adults of both genders, rather than youths.

Similar to Yallal Tankonjala, Jeriko Wollof has no health centre but is serviced by the one at Illiasa. Students in Jeriko Wollof attend school at neighbouring Yallal Tankonjala Lower Basic Primary School until Grade 6. Those who progress join Illiasa Upper Basic School until Grade 9. Subsistence agriculture is the mainstay of the village, involving the cultivation of rice, groundnuts and vegetables. Houses are mainly mud-brick structures with grass thatch, or corrugate iron-sheets. There is no electricity, thus firewood is the main source of fuel. They also reported water as their main challenge, although their communal boreholes were functioning. Their open-well needed renovation throughout fieldwork.

There was evidence of active youth participation in village politics and leadership. After our introductory meetings with the *alkalo*, he insisted the village youth leaders – both male and female- be invited to our consultative meeting with the council of village-elders. Thereafter, the *alkalo* delegated our hospitality to these youth leaders who played a pivotal role in introducing my research team to the youths in Jeriko Wollof.

On learning I was registered at a university in London, the male youth leader implored me to take him to England, facilitate his travel, send him invitation letters, and even sponsor his trip. 'Aminata, this farming will not make me prosperous. I need to go to *Anglais Terres* to make money,' he bashfully announced. The desire for migration was apparent even in this rural locale.

1.3.3.1c Illiasa

Illiasa is a primary healthcare (PHC) village with an established government clinic that was opened in 2002 to cater for 48 villages from Kerewan to Sarakunda. It is located opposite India, on the Barra-Farafenni highway. The majority ethnic group is Mandinka. According to residents, Islam is universal in Illiasa, and the village is reputed as being very pious; a reputation often referred to when rationalising the multiple funded development projects sponsored by Islamic faith organisations. Such projects include adult literacy and numeracy, women credit schemes, sustainable agriculture, women empowerment through skills development, entrepreneurial capacity building, etc. There are foreign volunteers for example from Peace Corps, Volunteer

Service Organisation, and Cuban medical interns. The rapid development of Illiasa is commonly credited to Mama Tamba – a son of the village who was a key player in the national history of independence.

Social life is organised upon the age-grade system enshrined within Mandinka customs and enforced through socialisation rituals peculiar to members of the same gender and age-group. Boys and girls are taught about their specific gender roles in cultural rites of passage which include circumcision and transfer of gender-differentiated knowledge. Thus the *kafoo* is a valued organising structure of daily interactions.

Three strongholds informing and shaping discourses about sexuality and youth sub-cultures in Illiasa invariably presented as 1) public health through the reproductive health model, 2) religious Islamic moralisations, and 3) Mandinka ethnic cleaving projected as traditional culture.

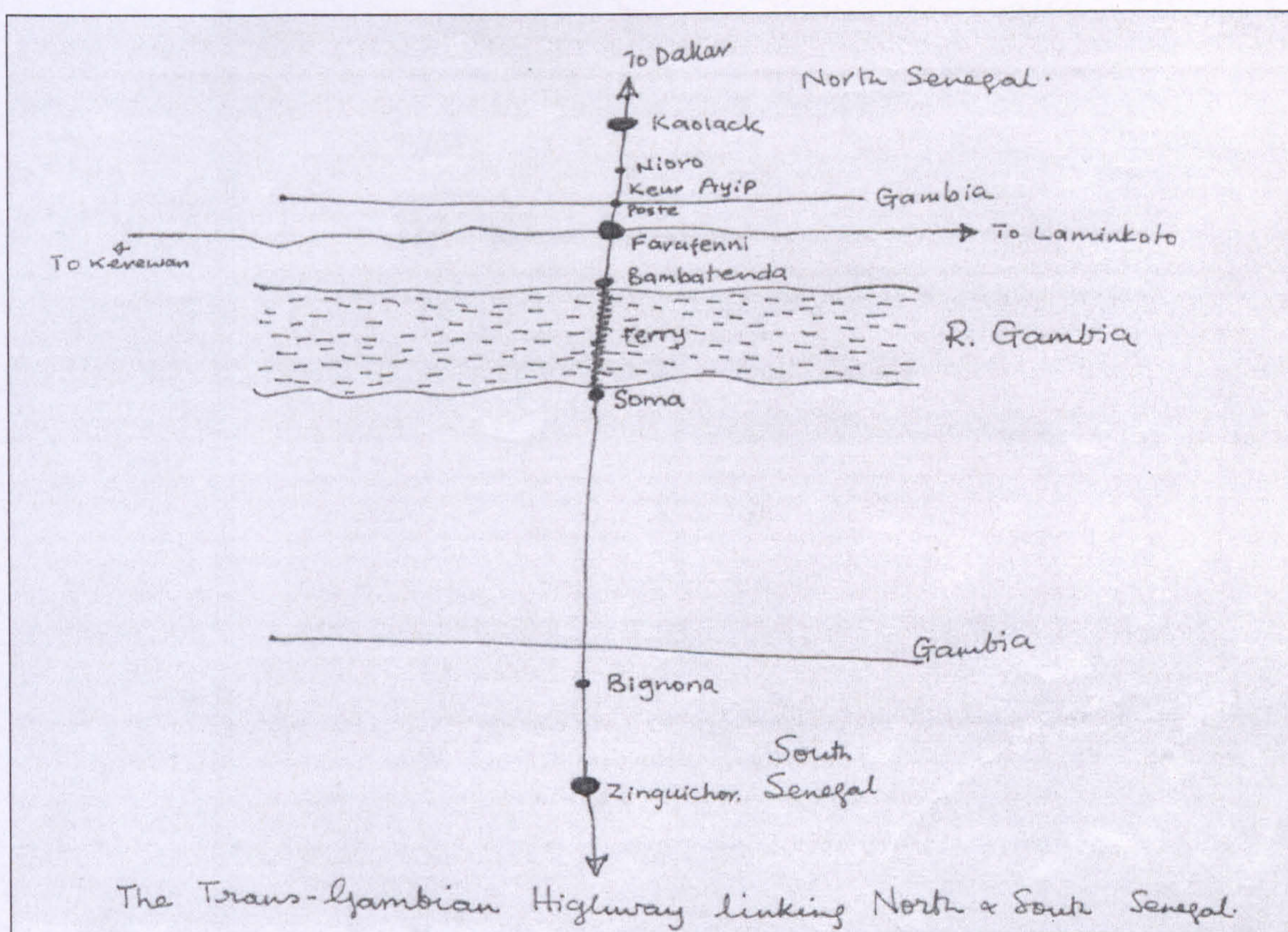
There is no electricity in Illiasa. Firewood is the main source of fuel. Water is fetched from collective boreholes or wells. Although rural, this settlement is fast expanding and attracting investments that have potential to transform it into a major town.

1.3.3.1d Farafenni

Located 170 kilometres inland from Banjul, Farafenni sits at coordinates 13°34'N 15°36'W on the border between The Gambia and Senegal. It is the commercial centre of North Bank East Division, with two main markets – one opposite GAMTEL and the other on the Kerewan highway -, and several traders' shops, make-shift roadside stalls, and vendors along the streets. Adjacent to the Football Stadium is a weekly market locally called *lumo*, which runs every Sunday from 7:00am to 6:00pm with a wide array of wares (including agricultural produce, cooked foodstuffs, livestock, domestic wares, clothes, medicines – both biomedical and traditional, tools and implements, spare parts, building materials, stationary, etc) and merchants plus clients drawn from the surrounding rural settlements, neighbouring Senegal and also Guinea Conakry, Guinea Bissau, Mauritanie, and Mali. Both the *dalasi* and franc *cefa* circulate in the

lumo. I regularly took a donkey-cart or rode my bicycle to the *lumo*. I learnt and practised my Wolof vocabulary with traders in the *lumo*, enjoyed weaving my way between lanes of merchandise, and observed local life in motion from a favourite *tangana* spot. I particularly practised the names of foodstuffs, and counting in Wolof as I haggled about prices or increasing the amount of stuff purchased at a price.

Figure 1.9 The N4/ Trans-Gambian highway linking north to south Senegal through The Gambia

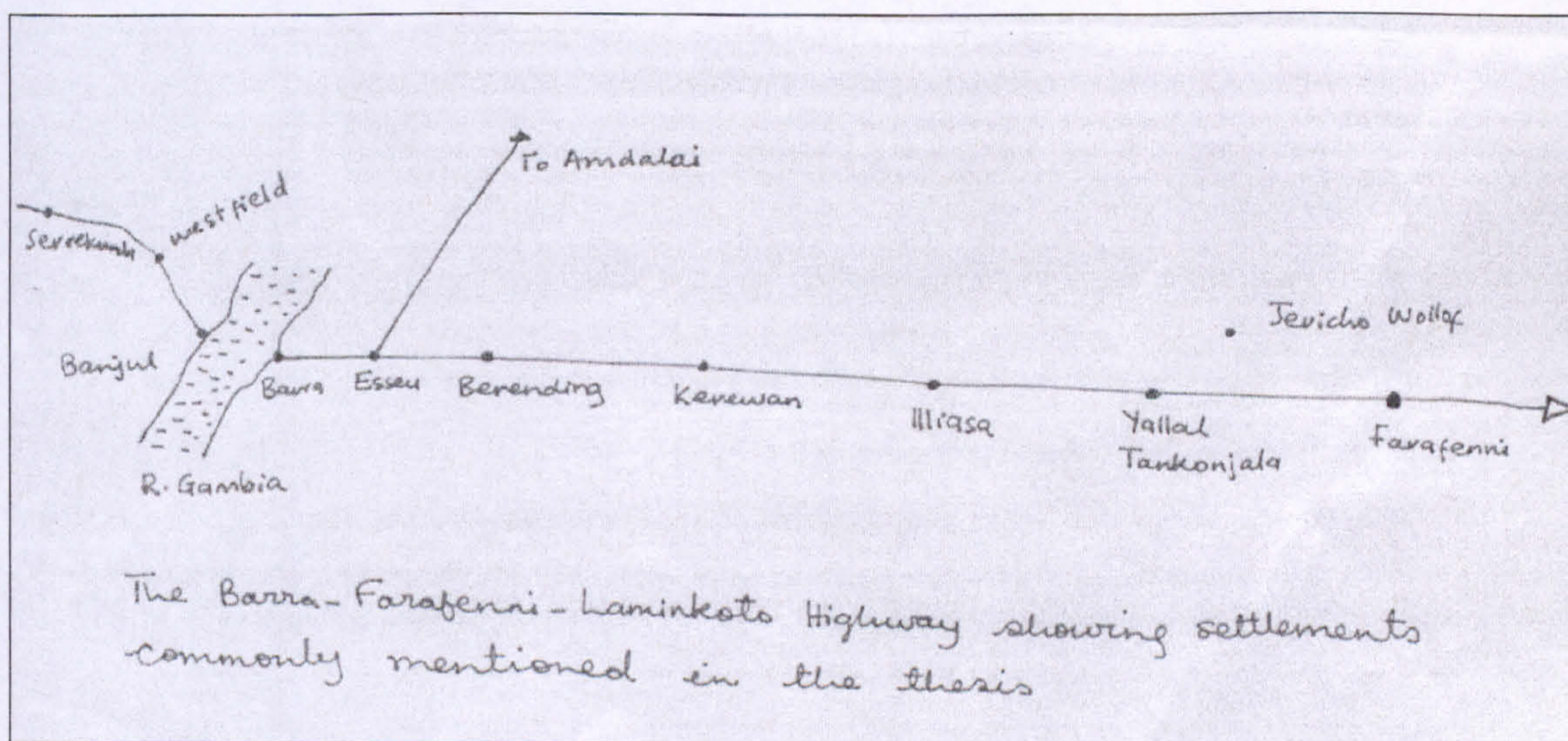


Farafenni is an important node in the Senegambian transportation network particularly because of the Trans-Gambian highway which connects north and south Senegal, as well as the Babatenda-Soma ferry terminal. Known as the N4 in Senegal, this highway is economically important because it links produce with markets. Running from Dakar through Kaolack and Nioro in

northern Senegal and intersecting the northern Senegal-Gambia border at Keur Ayip and Poste, this highway crosses the River Gambia through Farafenni at Babatenda and Soma and then into Bignona and Zinguichor in the Cassamance in southern Senegal. According to Gregg and Trillo (2003) the Gambian section of this highway is only 24 kilometres long, but the 800metre width of the River Gambia can only be crossed by a connecting ferry. The ferry service is suitable for heavy trucks transferring a diversity of merchandise between Dakar and the Cassamance. Thus this route is of significant economic importance because it transects national borders and also crosses the River Gambia.

Furthermore, the Barra-Farafenni-Laminkoto highway connects rural provinces in the east of The Gambia to the capital Banjul and the urban Kombos. It is suggested that this connectivity to Banjul is responsible for the heightened urbanisation of Farafenni in the mid-1990s, thereby transforming it into the commercial centre of the North Bank in place of both Kerewan and Kaur (see <http://columbia.edu/~msj42/PeopleandCulture.htm>).

Figure 1.10 The Barra-Farafenni-Laminkoto highway showing settlements mentioned in this thesis.



There are three stands for commercial public transport: two *garaz* for *gelegele* i.e. bush taxis driving specific routes, and one for 'town-trips' i.e. yellow with green striped taxis for special hire to any place. Farafenni is also important to national security because it houses a large military base called Ballangar Army Barracks.

There is an enormous modern referral hospital that was officially opened by President Yahya Jammeh in 2003. It was up-graded in 1998 from a health centre that opened in 1983 (Ratcliffe et al. 2002). I was among the people lining the hospital grounds to commemorate the opening of AFPRC hospital. Staff comprise local health workers, and some foreign experts. Cuban medical interns annually complement the hospital staff.

Farafenni is also a fieldwork station for the UK's Medical Research Council. Among its repertoire of scientific research is a rigorous demographic health survey among 40 rural villages since 1981 (MRC 2004:1). An urban component including Farafenni town and the area within a 5 kilometre radius was added to the survey in July 2002. I was employed at this field-station as a local anthropologist for a year (September 2002 – September 2003) before registering for my doctorate studies. I lived at the Catholic Mission in Mauritanie – a buoyant shanty behind the Police Post and close to NAWEC station. I also lived in Ballangar – close to the army barracks after marrying Ousman.

In 2002 the urban component of the Farafenni demographic health survey had a total population of 26,008, comprising 13,503 females and 12,505 males (MRC 2004:1). This area has been described to 'manifest an age structure characterised by youthfulness and a fairly rapid growth rate. In Farafenni town, the main language is Wollof, although Mandinka, Fula and other local languages are also fairly common.

There is piped water provided by NAWEC. Electricity is available but very unreliable in the town. Thus institutions that rely on electricity like the MRC field-station, AFPRC hospital, and GAMTEL, have private generators. In the centre of the town, there is a police post that deals with

customs, immigration and keeps law and order. Trust Bank operates one branch in Farafenni. There are several micro-credit schemes, rural development projects, non-government organisations, literacy programmes, etc. Islam is the predominant religion with various mosques. There is also a Catholic church, a Baptist mission church, and two Pentecostal fellowships.

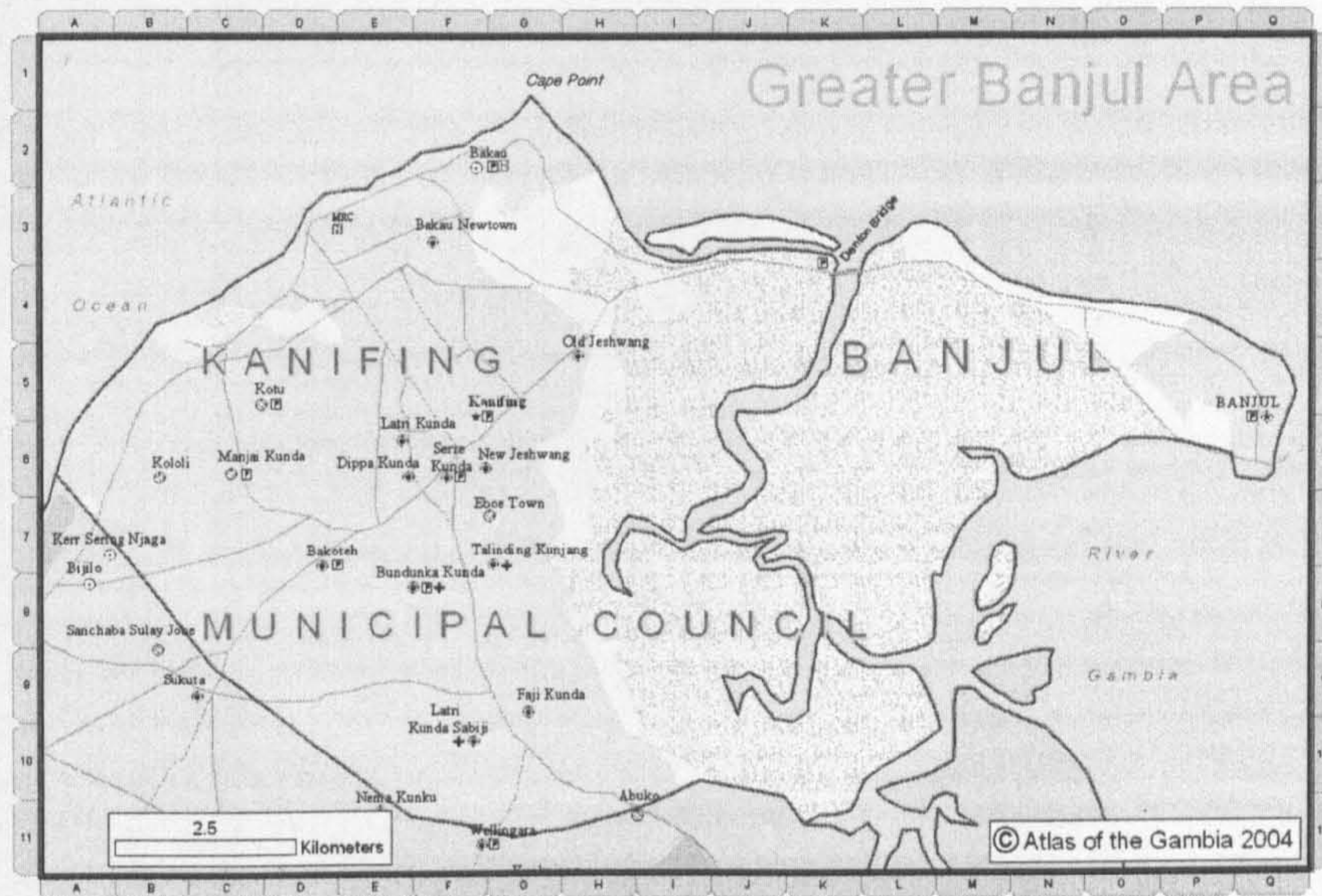
Farafenni town has five schools namely Farafenni Lower Basic Primary School, Mauritanie Lower Basic Primary School, Farafenni Junior Secondary School, Anglican Junior Secondary School, and Farafenni Senior Secondary School. I located four *madarasas* in Ballangar, Mauritanie, near the stadium and one near the hospital. *Almoudous* with their classic red tomato-paste tins for begging regularly came to my house for any leftover food (see Hunt 1993 for detailed discussion of this phenomenon).

While private social programmes happen in people's compounds and on street corners, Farafenni also hosts periodic commercial public programmes at the Community Centre, Edie's Bar and Motel, and also at the Mini Stadium usually in the form of local bands. Sunu Yai restaurant, AFPRC hospital restaurant, Eddie's bar and motel, Ballangar Motel and Assane's bar mostly cater to foreigners. Local residents mainly buy local dishes in smaller unnamed food-shops, *tangana* joints, *afra* vendors, *ebbe and nyebbe* sellers.

1.3.3.1e Kotu

Located on the Atlantic Ocean, Kotu is an up-market urban residential area in Kannifing Municipality, leading onto the beach. It is adjacent to Kololi, Kotusilo, Bakoteh, Manjang Kunda and Senegambia. A section of Kotu is within the tourist resort area. In 1983 the population of Kotu was 408, and in 1993 it rose to 4,419 indicating a growth rate of 26.901%. Projected population for 2003 was 47,862. These census data are confirmed by a demographic survey which found 1084 households in 2001 compared to 348 in 1993 in Kotu, giving a 211% increase (Milligan, Njie and Bennet 2004:473). The rapid growth of Kotu, is part of the fast urbanisation of areas around Banjul.

Figure 1.11 Greater Banjul Area. Yellow representing urbanized area.



The compounds in Kotu are mostly humongous double- or triple-storied concrete structures with tiled roofing, coloured glass windows and heavily-barred doors. Wealth, class and stature emanate from the solidity of the concrete-block walls fencing these compounds. Kotu is inhabited by the elite and relatively wealthy classes, many of whom live and work or have family abroad. Compound-owners in Kotu are either senior public civil servants, politicians, private proprietors, or foreign investors. Many Gambian nationals resident in Kotu, simultaneously maintain compounds in other locations, particularly in the rural provinces.

Kotu is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. I lived very close to the mosque for a year during my fieldwork. I have also been a member of a household adjacent to Kotu Beach hotel. Thus it was practical for me to observe and interview youths involved in the sex tourism industry, as a resident member of Kotu. I also interviewed resident youths in the evenings during chat groups.

1.3.3.1f Talinding Kunjang

Talinding Kunjang (aka Talinding Kunda) is a fast-growing peri-urban dwelling located on the Kombo-Sillah highway, in Kannifing Municipality. Neighbouring Tabokoto, Fajikunda, Bundung, and Serrekunda, it forms part of the urban area commonly referred to as Kombos. Its coordinates are 13°25'38N and 16°40'25W. It is very dusty mainly because of the sandy streets – bare without tarmac, and littered with over-flowing mounds of domestic refuse. Many male youths from Talinding Kunjang refer to their area as 'the Ghetto'. The congestion of structures along the highway create an impression of a typical African shanty: dilapidated buildings thirsty for repainting, rusty tin roofs, small open gutters, hardly indicating any systematic physical planning. Compounds have standing pipes for water. Electricity is commercially available, and individuals connect it to their compounds depending upon affordability. While many structures are permanent, several others are evidently temporary and make-shift.

There are several corner kiosks in between buildings. Several service outlets including a video club mostly showing action films, Nollywood dramas or international football matches, hair saloons, motor garage, carpentry workshops, are sprinkled all over the area amidst homes. There is a day care centre built by Standard Chartered Bank for destitute children in the area. Trust Bank sits at the top of the main road leading to Tallinding Kujang, opposite the Buffer Zone – an expansive community park that leads to a big sandy ground where four football matches can simultaneously happen. The grounds serve several social functions including reproductive health drama campaigns, end of year overnight disco dances, political campaigns, youth day celebrations, evangelist rallies by both Muslims and Christians, inter-school sports competitions, etc. Adjacent to this is the Ahmaddiya Mosque, the Ahmaddiya private hospital, and the Tallinding Arabic Institute which is reputed for reaching out to the Tallinding Markaz – youths sold out to mass evangelism. There is also the Tallinding Central Mosque for nominal Muslims close by. Tallinding Kunjang has a market. It is popular for Nusrat Senior Secondary School. It is

multi-ethnic, multi-cultural with both Gambian nationals and several foreigners from Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, Sierra Leone.

According to the national population and housing census in 1983 the population of Tallinding Kunjang was 7,527, but rose to 19,773 in 1993 – indicating a growth rate of 10.14%. Projected population for 2003 was thus 51,943 (i.e. 9,443 women and 10,330 women). Likewise, a survey conducted in 2001 found 410 households compared to 107 in 1993, indicating an increase of 283% (Milligan, Njie and Bennet 2004:473).

I rented a rented house in a Mandinka compound in Tallinding Kujang between 2004 and 2005.

1.3.3.2 Sampling techniques

My sampling strategy which combined purposive, snow-ball and theoretical sampling techniques, aimed at developing a nuanced and in-depth understanding of youth sexualities, instead of generalisability. None of the people approached refused to participate in the study.

1.3.3.2a Purposive sampling

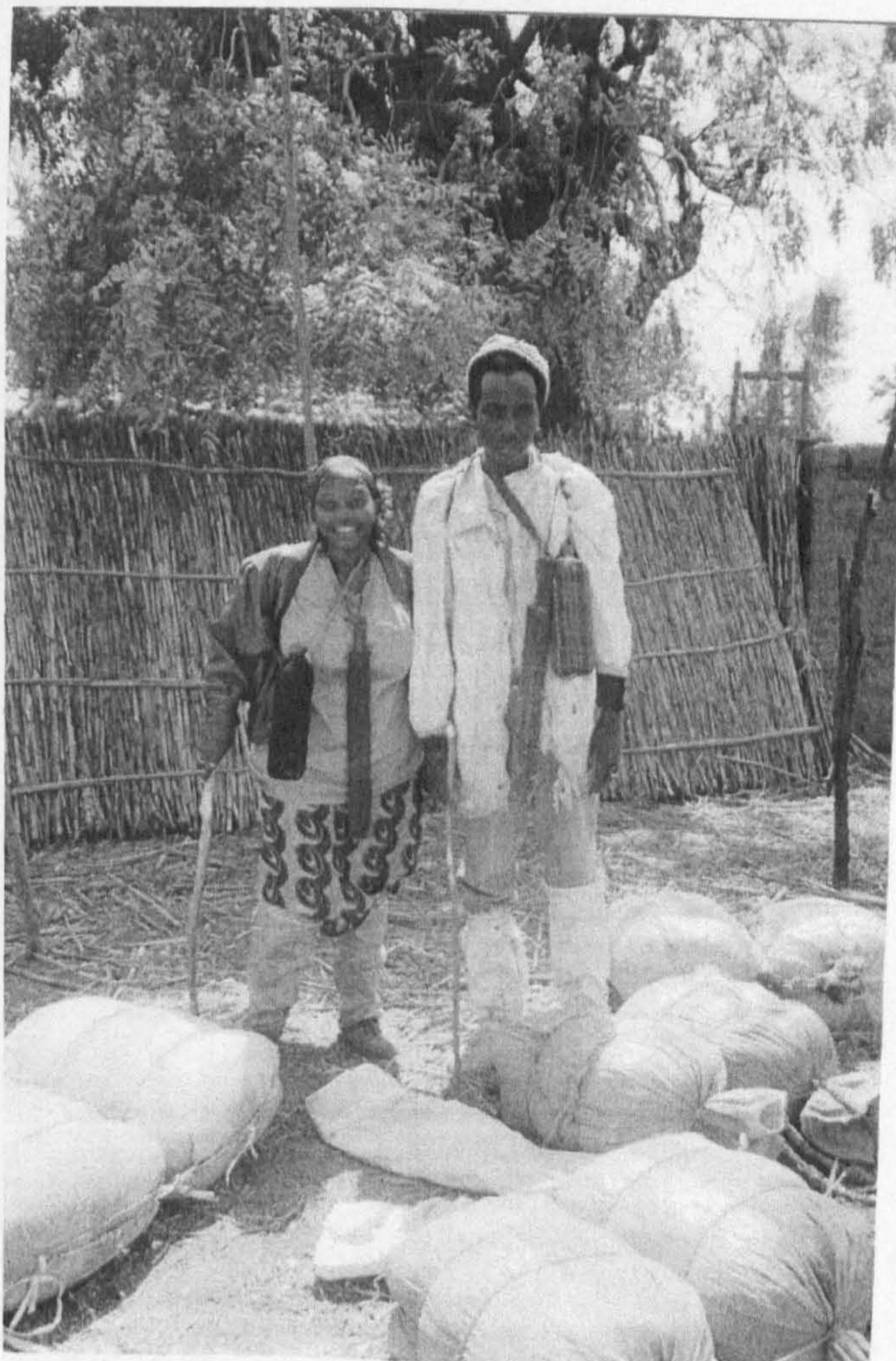
I recruited youths from the urban and rural study sites, to provide a basis for comparative analysis between the two social-physical divides. Initially as themes of relevance were explored, sampling techniques were predominantly purposive, although I chose from different genders, religions, tribes, education, and marital status. The boundaries of the study sample were always fluid, as participants were determined in response to unfolding findings in the data. This is in accordance with grounded theory and the interpretivist analytical framework.

1.3.3.2b Snowball sampling

In addition, I used snowball sampling techniques to recruit key informants, knowledgeable in the field of youth sexuality and reproductive health in The Gambia. Key informants included unique youths, schoolteachers, Division Health Team members, parents of participating youths, anti-HIV/AIDS campaigners, village elders, religious leaders, *Marabouts*, healers, traditional birth

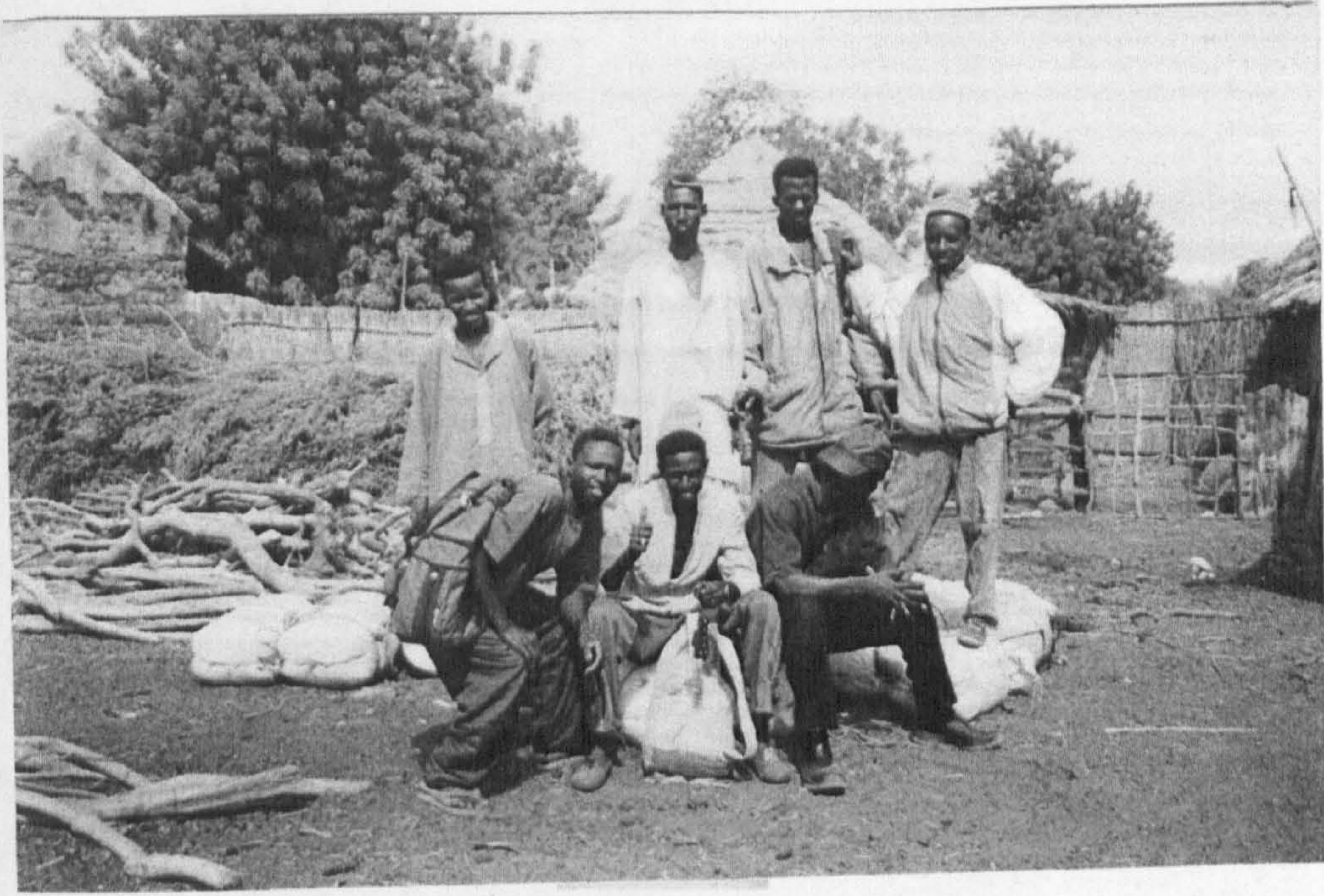
attendants (TBAs), policymakers, local celebrities, national youth workers, and members of related Departments of State.

Figure 1.12 Knowledge of one cross-border smuggler...



As the research revealed some practices that were socially proscribed, snowball sampling was particularly useful to the expansion of either closed off, closeted or socially unaccepted categories of people.

Figure 1.13 ...led to contacting other smugglers



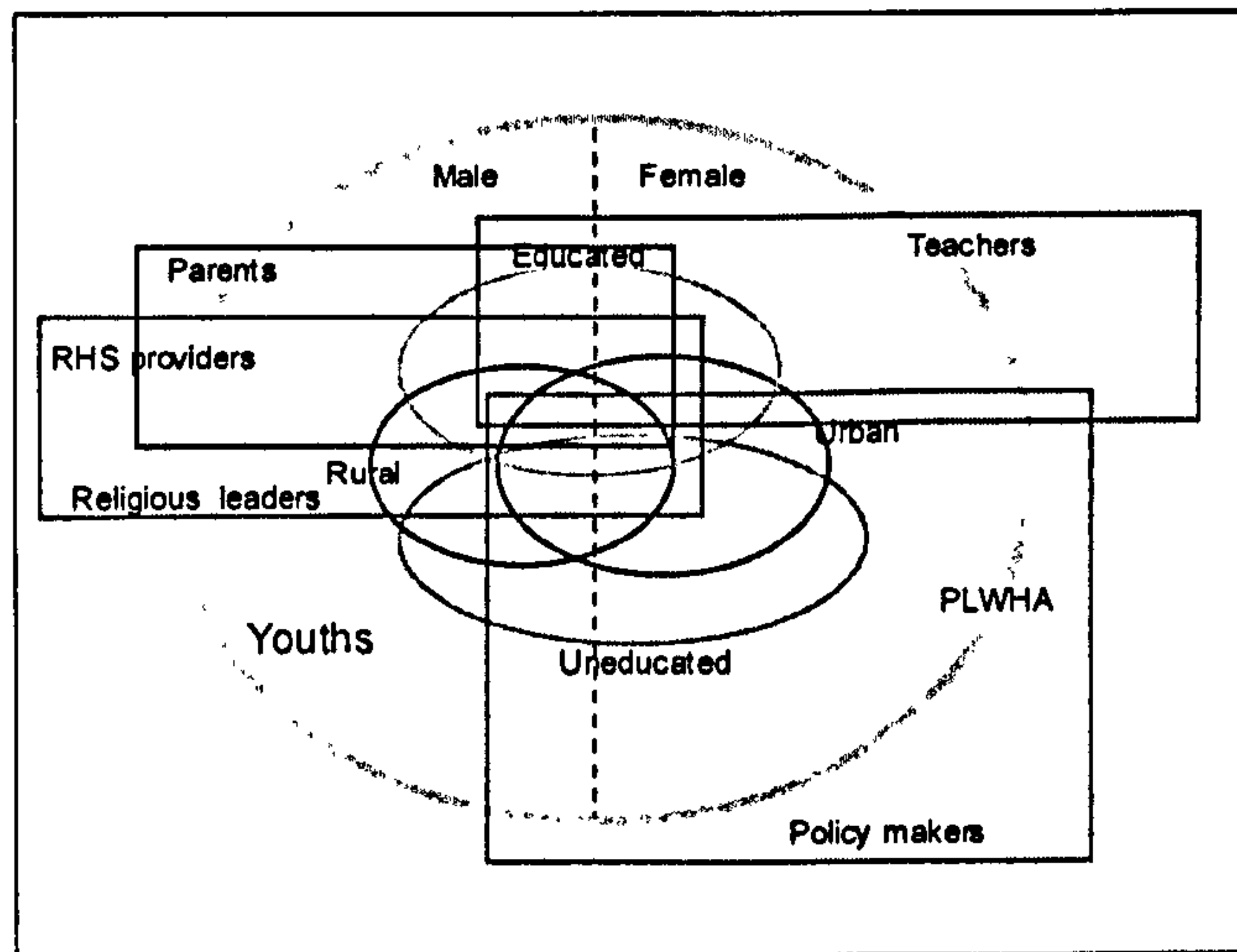
1.3.3.3c Theoretical sampling

Unlike the sampling done in quantitative investigations, theoretical sampling cannot be planned before embarking on a grounded theory study. The specific sampling decisions evolve during the research process itself.

Strauss and Corbin (1990:192)

After preliminary coding, I employed theoretical sampling techniques (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This is purposive sampling which increases the diversity of the study sample through searching for different properties. As categories emerged from the preliminary data, additions were made to the initial sample in order to further increase diversity in useful ways. The purpose was to strengthen the emerging theory by defining the properties of the categories, and how these mediated the relationships between categories. Therefore I specifically used theoretical sampling when a core category and its linked themes reached the point of saturation.

Figure 1.14 Description of the eventual study sample



1.4 Data collection

Data collection combined ethnographic fieldwork together with literature review and policy analysis.

1.4.1 Ethnographic fieldwork

Fieldwork is for us also a voyage in a different sense, since it is the royal road to the anthropological calling. The would-be anthropologist trains for fieldwork, disappears into the field, and finally returns to write up his research, collect his PhD, and embark upon his professional career. As a number of anthropologists have noticed, no more perceptively than Rosemary Firth, we see here the familiar tripartite structure common to most transition rituals. In the first stage the neophyte prepared to surrender his old status and to shed his ethnocentric assumptions. In the second 'liminal' phase he retires to learn the new culture of his hosts. In the third phase, he re-emerges to be re-adopted within his own academic culture in his new role as professional anthropologist. Each stage has its attendant trauma, which have to a certain extent become conventionalised, the most taxing being those of the actual fieldwork and subsequent writing-up. Here,

however, there is a deep paradox. In its factual and theoretical concerns, anthropology is a cumulative discipline in which new discoveries give rise to new theories and these in turn engender novel research projects. Yet, the actual field experience is for each new recruit a unique and often regressive personal drama. This can be prepared for. But its full impact can never be precisely estimated in advance, nor can one say with complete confidence what the outcome will be.

Lewis (1972)

The comparative ethnographic fieldwork (Le Compte & Preissle 1993, Le Compte & Schensul 1991, 1999, Spradley 1979) was conducted in two study sites: North Bank Division and Kombos St. Mary's¹⁰. Working with research assistants, I lived in each study area; took part in the daily lives of the members of the communities in the villages and town. I conducted participant observation specifically with the aim of systematically recording data about the lives of youths and the people that matter to them (Spradley 1980, Mays & Pope 1995). I went to the places that youths went, 'hang out' with them, worked for example on the farms, or fetched water from the well, or cooked with them and attempted to experience life as they did. The results of the participant observation were recorded as field notes and incorporated into data analysis.

In line with ethnography, I earnestly recorded my personal experiences as a researcher, specifically the struggles of 'fitting in' or rather 'sticking out' because even though I am a black African female body, there were several social cultural issues, norms and values which were taken for granted in the study context, yet I grappled with them (for example issues of control, subservience, dependency, silence, invisibility, a de-eroticised femininity, etc.) Furthermore, because I was continuously playing out roles for my diverse research audiences, I was also alert for performances specifically staged for my consumption by the participants I am studying.

¹⁰ This comprises Banjul, Greater Banjul, Bakau, Serrekunda up to Farrato.

1.4.1.1 The role of research assistants

During my first visit to The Gambia, Katie Paine – an anthropologist then at the MRC advised me that the easiest way to learn to speak the local language was from children. The challenge for me was the multiple languages that were simultaneously spoken in the provincial North Bank as well as the urban Kombos where I was located. Study participants spoke either/ or/ and Fula, Mandinka, Wollof, Serer, Jola, etc¹¹. Therefore I always worked with local translators.

My main interlocutor was Ousman Bah, a Fula native who was fluent in Fula, Mandinka, Wollof and also had limited knowledge of Serahuli and Jola. He worked with me throughout the research. In the urban-based study, we also worked with Sulayman Joof, a Karoninka native who was fluent in Mandinka, Manjagos, Wollof, Serer, and Karoninka. Much earlier, he worked as a research assistant to Stephen Thomson – another anthropologist in The Gambia. I invited Sulayman to join Ousman and I, as we lived with and interviewed *marabouts* and PLWHA. It was important for these two study sub-population groups that I worked with mature ethnographers who were not only skilful interviewers, but also knew how to read unique contexts, respond with appropriate behaviour, and maintain an adequate balance between their right as researchers to knowledge versus their responsibility as humane beings to respect the emotional load of PLWHAs or the local-knowledge systems of the *marabouts*. Prior to my doctoral research, I worked for a year with both Ousman and Sulayman as part of an ethnographic fieldwork team that studied malaria prevention and treatment in ten villages surrounding Farafenni (see appendix 11). Although one may suppose that their translation skills were oriented towards bio-medical research, it is important to highlight that I trained this team in ethnographic translation, interpretation, transcription and note-taking.

¹¹ Other researchers (e.g. Gamble 2002) confirm that multi-lingual locales are the norm in The Gambia, rather than the exception.

Figure 1.15 Ousman interviewing a Fula elder

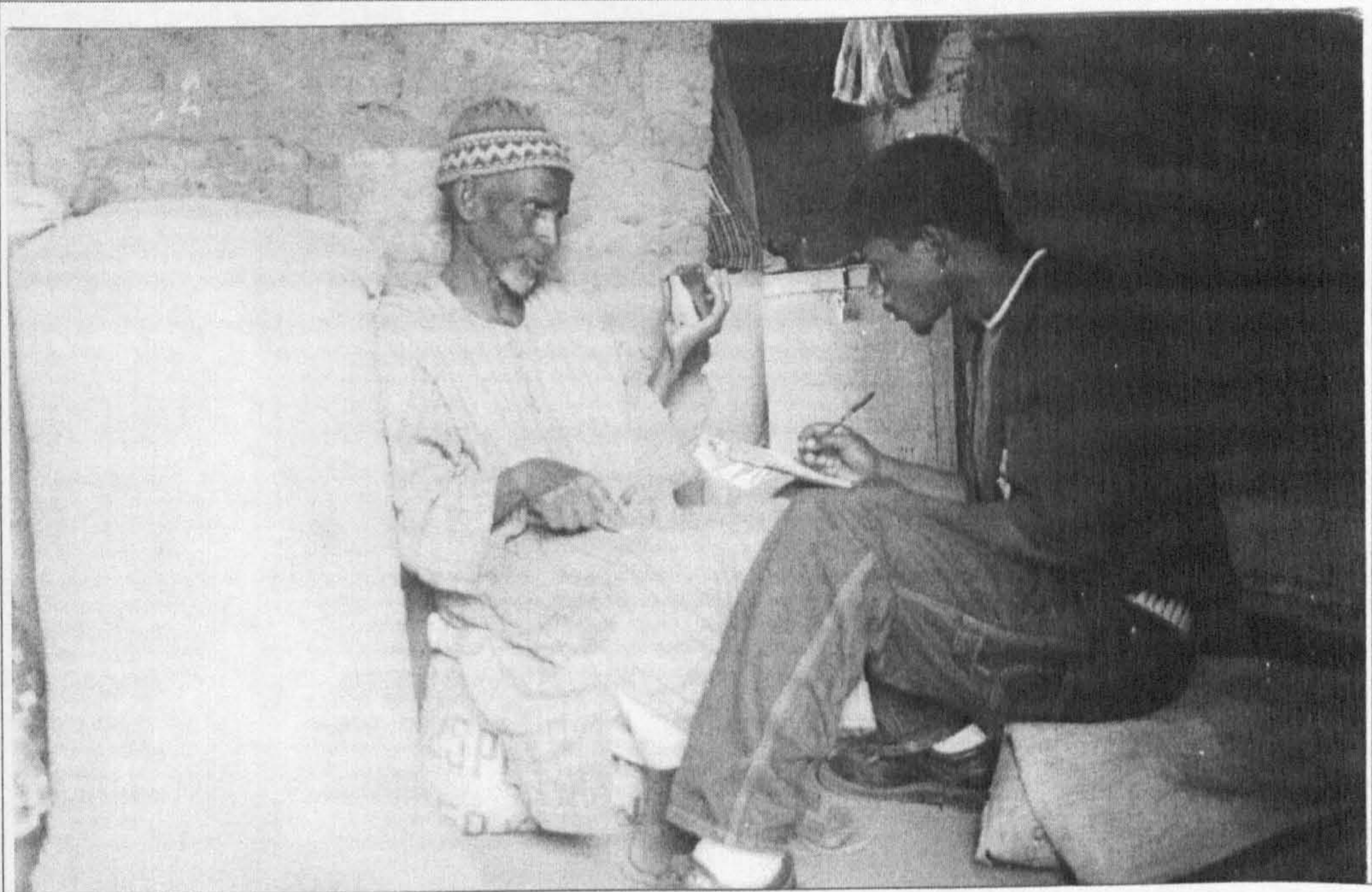


Figure 1.16 Sulayman interviewing an international marabout



I employed my sister, Susan Nyanzi as research assistant for fieldwork among beach-boys reputed for having sexual liaisons with tourists (Wagner 1977, 1981, Wagner and Yamba 1986). She recently just graduated with a first class Bachelor of Arts degree in Tourism. During fieldwork, we both noticed an unintended benefit of having Susan in my research team. Dressing mainly in western-style attire, her person attracted a ready stream of *bumsters*, making participant observation and later recruitment of active *bumsters* into focus group discussions or in-depth interviews, easier. Her physique, presentation and English accent attracted the *bumsters*. She also contributed to data collection among urban youths, in youth organisations and with national youth policymakers and programme workers.

1.4.1.2 Local language fluencies

Initially I took conversation lessons from Alhagie Samba – a watchman employed by the MRC Laboratories. His routine often positioned him at the Catholic Mission Guest House, my home throughout my employment with the MRC Laboratories from January to September 2003. Over several weeks, Alhagie Samba taught me greetings, common nouns, verbs, frequently used expressions, numerals, times of the day, etc. He taught me the local words in Wollof, and Mandinka. I tried out my language and vocabulary on anyone who encouraged me by listening or spurring conversation. I mostly spoke Wollof because of the people living in my immediate neighbourhood in Mauritanie. On weekends when I was in Farafenni, Ousman and I would often go to the Sunday market – the *Lumo*, where I practiced the language.

‘*Bi nya talla?*’ - meaning: how much is this?’ I would ask, as I pointed at an item, of course after greeting the unsuspecting seller.

Then I learnt the names of common market wares, so that I could practice the following week in the *lumo*. *Supame, soble, kaani, diwutil, batanse, jen, nen, kanar, etc.* Then I learnt to count: *bena, nyari, nyenent, nyeti, jurom, etc.*

And then came, ‘*Wanyil ko!*’ *Wanyil wai?* – Reduce the price, reduce please!’

Eventually I began to string imperfect sentences together.

'Man bugga batanse, supame, kaani ak soble! – I would like egg plants, cabbage, peppers and onions.'

While in Farafenni and the surrounding villages of the North Bank, I was comfortable and confident speaking Wollof. I spoke as they did, accent, words and all – because I mainly learnt the language through imitation. However, I was shocked when I got to Kombos and people laughed at my accent, pointing out that I spoke *Fanafana* Wollof. I later learnt that this was a telltale provincial accent which pointed me out as a 'bush-woman from the provinces.' The diction, the style, the pronunciation, the accent, was different to the Banjulian accent which had a mark of urbanity¹². Skramstad (1990) describes a similar experience, the only difference being that unlike me, there was no expectation on her to speak the language because she was a *Toubab*. And to further compound my task of practicing speaking as much Wollof as I could, when I was in Kombos with the urban youths – most of whom were educated or exposed to foreign media or people - they insisted on speaking English with me. Similar to Pool (1994) when faced with such individuals, I found it ridiculous to insist on staggering on in barely fluent Mandinka, Fula or Wollof.

After a while I decided to concentrate my abilities on learning to speak fluent Wollof, and only memorise important interaction speech in Mandinka, Fula and Jola. The Mandinka, and Fula came in handy when I went to the compounds that Ousman and I had members to interview, or when I spent weeks living with them to participate in an aspect of their lives including ceremonies, farming, death or merely 'chilling'. I slightly improved at Mandinka when I lived in Marenakunda (March 2004 – October 2005) – a household full of Mandingoes. I learnt chat vocabulary, predominantly from the children (see also Gamble 2002:87 who found it easier to

¹² According to Gamble 2002:95-97, the categorisations of Sene-Gambian Wollof language mainly fall into four namely, (1) Banjul Wollof where many terms are derived from English and Krio, (2) Up-river Wollof especially the dialect of the Saalum districts, (3) Wollof as spoken in Dakar including urban slang and a strong admixture of French words or phrases, and (4) griots who also have their own speech. He also discusses the different Fula dialects (2002:92-94). See Jatta (1977) for a treatise of Gambian Mandinka language.

have children as his Mandinka language-teachers during evening chats). Later when my baby arrived, the younger children would come to be with her, play with her, and there I learnt some more Mandinka – this time a baby version. I also learnt some prayer words because Iye – the landlord's mother, often prayed for me and others in her mother-tongue. Furthermore, when my mother was visiting with me, Sulayman Joof would offer her language lessons in Mandinka, and she often practiced on me. I picked up some vocabulary from her.

When I formally married Ousman in 2005, and became a member of a large extended Fula family, there was some pressure for me to learn Fula. Earlier attempts in 2003 had taught me that Fula is tonal, has unique phonetics, and numerous dialects leading to extended arguments about the 'correct' version. I mastered the basics for conversation. However, most of the children in my marital family also spoke Wolof, English, Mandinka, and French. Sometimes they laboured to teach me Fula, but most of the time we just conversed in either English, French or Wolof depending on their fluency.

1.4.1.3 Photography

As a student taking anthropology at London University, no mention was ever made of the use of photography in fieldwork. Nor were there any courses dealing with fieldwork. One was supposed to absorb this by a process of osmosis from those who had been in the field, or from general reading. Gamble (2002:98)

On my initial visit to The Gambia in November 2002, I learnt through observation that many Gambians were amazingly interested in posing for a camera; any camera – even a stranger's. I noticed how people – men, women, teenagers and children all straightened up and posed, sometimes smiling or drawing their faces into seriousness as they stared at the camera. Since I mostly lived on the touristy Senegambian beach, that first week, I was impressed that the locales I observed smiling at *toubabs* did not ask questions about why they were photographing them,

often without permission¹³. When I started living in Farafenni in early 2003, I attended some ceremonies in the vicinity of my neighbourhood. I found myself playing the role of sole photographer – getting requests from well-dressed ladies to take their group pictures. I would then offer to bring the print-outs to their homes when they were ready, at no financial cost. This was a relatively easier route into the local community as an ethnographer – away from routine work with my official team of research assistants. This way, I made my own circle of friends.

I quickly included photography as an integral component of my research tools. I took photos at ceremonies, but also for individuals who participated in the study. I printed copies in duplicate, keeping a copy for my file and giving the rest to those who were in them. This helped establish some rapport, get access to some members (as in some cases I was invited to ceremonies on the grounds of taking photographs). Because photography was not in my initial research proposal, I had to adjust my information sheets and consent forms to incorporate permission to use photographs taken during research in ways that would not endanger the research participants (see appendices 3 and 4).

Dr. David Gamble and Linda Salmon powerfully illustrated a variety of ways in which photography can be employed in field research. They used photographs to ‘show what The Gambia is like – providing photography of the major ethnic groups – Mandinka, Wollof, Fulbe, both urban and rural; as well as displaying something of Gambian arts and crafts, and historic sites.’ (Gamble 2002:iii). In addition to using photography to present peoples, setting and aspects of material culture, I further employed the camera to capture highlights of process, to illustrate contrasts, differences or similarities, to illustrate the human satire of life, as a frozen living commentary of the themes and narratives in my thesis, to prove my participation in local life, and

¹³ Compare with an earlier anthropologist’s account in 1946. ‘In the rural areas there were rarely any problems about taking photographs. In the urban situation, people were unwilling to be photographed unless they felt properly prepared. For the Wollof, being photographed is an occasion which involves careful preparation, putting on one’s best dress, holding a pose which is in vogue at the time. Permission to take photographs should be politely asked, and a refusal graciously accepted. At one time nobody wondered about the use that might be made of photographs. Now people would ask if the picture was going to appear in a magazine, on a postcard, in a book, etc. (Gamble 2002:99).

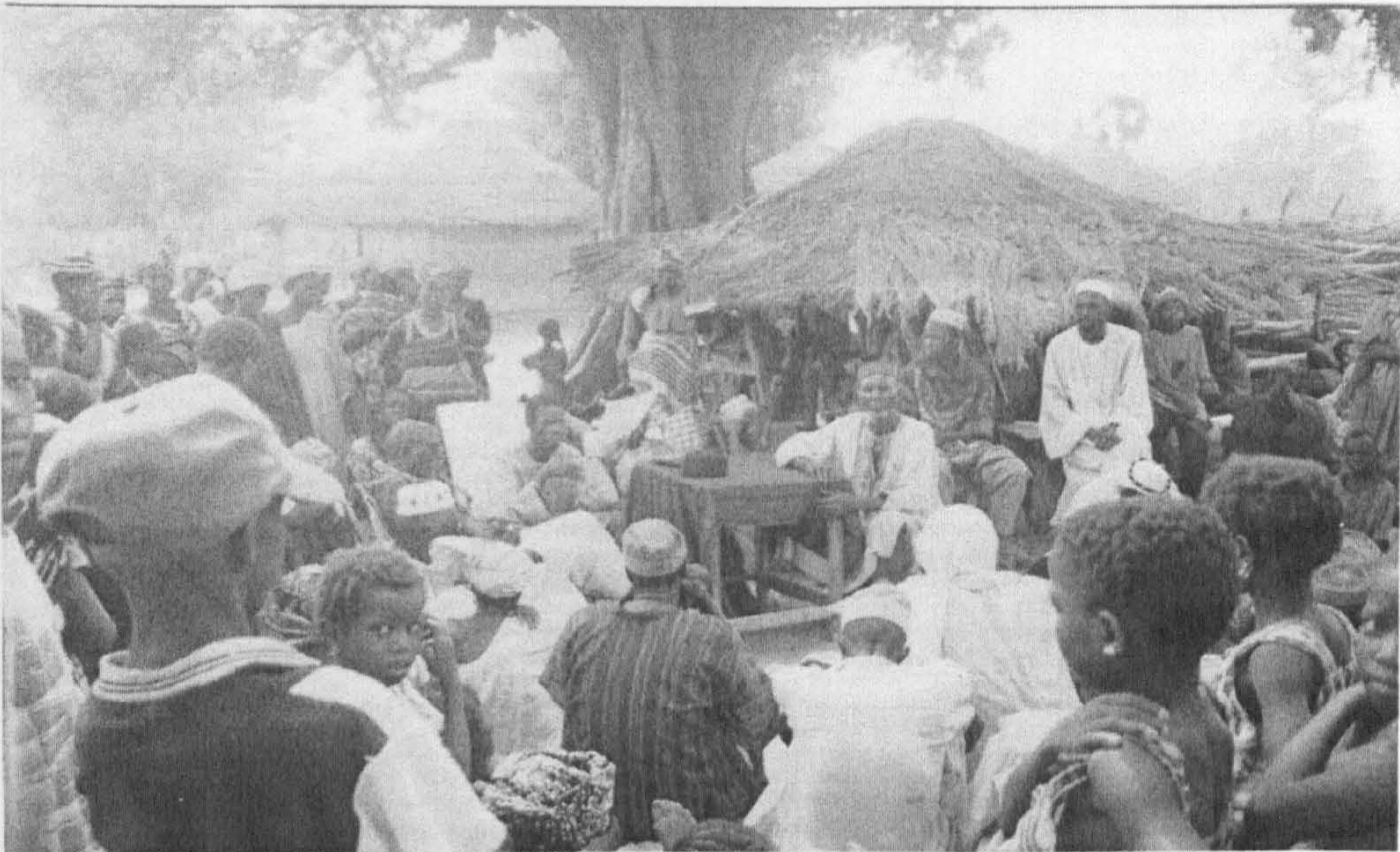
perhaps attempt to relay the nuanced essence of some expressions, and gesticulations hard to capture in words.

The pictures also re-sharpened my memory of specific events that had slightly dimmed. As the writer in me struggled over diction, syntax, punctuation, grammar and brilliance of thought, I was amazed at how pictorial images precisely, concisely and perfectly conveyed the volume of words I had written, rephrased, edited, and so forth. Thus photography was not only a tool of data collection, but also data storage. It contributed to the analysis and supplemented presentation of the final results, be it in this thesis, in oral presentations supported by electronic presentations, posters or other written texts

1.4.1.4 Village meetings

Village meetings were an integral component of the social political rubric of rural areas in The Gambia. Important meetings were advertised by the Alkalo or his representative at communal gatherings particularly the mosque during Friday *Juma* prayers. I attended several such important meetings including the annual presidential tour, the village health mobile units – specifically for women and children, non-governmental organisation development programmes, visits by international ‘development tourists’ (Chambers 1994), introduction of yet another MRC research project, etc. Many other village meetings were impromptu, and took advantage of good timing, loud noise and hand-outs to draw a crowd. These tended to be advertised randomly by word of mouth around the huts, houses, compounds and in the fields, a few hours before the actual meeting time. Good timing considered the season, the climate, the activity, the time of day, etc.

Figure 1.17 A village meeting with AFPRC praise-singers – Samba Soto 2003



I tapped into this existing community life, and held village meetings to introduce the study in the villages. The meetings were two fold:

- (a) a village introductory meeting with the village leadership, and
- (b) general village meetings at the beginning and the end of the study.

1.4.1.1a Introductory village meetings

Initially we met the *Alkalo* and introduced ourselves, the research study – especially tackling our methods of data collection and the target population we hoped to mostly interact with in the formal sessions. In all cases the *Alkalos* welcomed us, gave us an audience, but then proceeded to stress how they would not decide about our acceptance without consulting with their appointed council of elders. This often resulted in an impromptu meeting with the village leadership consisting of the *Imam*, the women's representative, the VDC leader, some elderly long-term landholders and compound heads, the village health-worker, etc.

The members were summoned by a youthful messenger who quickly went to each of their compounds, telling them, 'The *Alkalo* has some strangers'¹⁴. He needs you to come for a meeting with them as soon as you can.'

We started the meetings when a quorum of at least five people had gathered. A few more members joined as the meeting progressed. The *Imam* would open the meeting by leading us in recitations of joint prayers. Thereafter the *Alkalo* introduced each member of his team by name, their position, and the role that they played on the committee and in the village. He would briefly introduce our research team and then hand over to us.

I then addressed the village leadership with the help of my translator. I explained who I was, where I was from – Uganda in Africa but also London in England where I was studying. I always told them that I am a student doing research about culture, sexuality and reproductive health¹⁵ among youths. I explained that the main product of my research would be a big book with local stories; this book would be examined by three *Toubabs* who are experts on African books. And I stressed that I had come to their community – not as an expert on their affairs, but rather as a student because I verily did not know about their way of life. I begged them to teach me their ways, their values, their beliefs, their practices, and their culture(s); promising that I was a willing student. After this phase focussing on me, I then introduced my research team, explained about the study, how we collected data and our main target study groups, namely youths, youth workers, elders, health workers, parents, teachers, etc. I touched upon the tape recorder for formal interview sessions, our process of eliciting informed consent using the consent forms, confidentiality, and disassociated this particular research from other studies I or the team members previously participated in. I always gave my research team members an opportunity to speak about any issues they felt were pertinent to the study context, which I may

¹⁴ Guests, whether previously known or unknown, are referred to as strangers.

¹⁵ While a distinct field in the English language, I found it very difficult to get to a local translation of reproductive health in Wollof, Mandinka and Fula, even though I consulted the DHT members at their offices in Farafenni. Rather than translate into a specific label, the concept had to be explained when talking with ordinary study participants.

have ignored or left out due to my limited knowledge of the study settings. As much as was reasonable, we stuck to the study's information sheet that was approved by the ethics review board of the LSHTM (see appendix 5). We provided a general picture of the basic research study and process, avoiding detailed particularities. After our presentation, I opened the discussion to questions, comments, or clarifications from the village leadership. For me as the principal investigator, there was always the delicate tension between the need for me to provide as much appropriate and sufficient information about the study as would enable participants to make an informed choice about whether or not to participate on one hand, and the avoidance of specific details that would pre-empt the research by causing participants to premeditate, consult each other or cram meaningless blue-print response templates on the other hand. However, whenever participants raised specific questions about the study, I gave them as much accurate factual information as I could.

Often the Alkalo re-invited members of his council of elders to air their views. In all the villages, the different leaders welcomed our research with enthusiasm, granting us permission to freely work in the village. Many promised whatever support they could. In one village, the village leaders asked about what specific age groups of youths I wanted to work with. I responded that I was interested in 'youths' – anyone who considered themselves to be a youth was welcome to participate in the study. The youths were also free to choose and identify themselves. Several questions from the village leaders revolved around the issue of remuneration or gains that study participants would receive from me. To this type of question, my response was always to stress that I was a student with limited financial resources, but that I would endeavour to be true to their local stories – giving them projection, amplification and visibility to both academic and development oriented audiences who might eventually respond by implementing a programme of intervention. I stressed that my role was to find out what was happening on the ground and publish it to those who had the power, resources and mandate to act in ways that would intervene. Another common question involved my uses of the recorded information that participants shared

with me in confidence. The village leaders cautioned me against abusing the confidence and trust of study participants. They stressed that it was important that information was not traced back to those who said it, particularly in cases where it could be used against them. I gave them my word, reassured them that I was bound by my research permit from NCAC, as well as the ethical approval from LSHTM to protect my research participants as far as was legally permissible.

At the end of the meeting, I handed over kola nuts which were shared out among all present. Sometimes it was important to keep a few kola nuts for absentee key individuals. Thereafter, we took some group photographs with the research team and the village leadership. In some cases we closed the meetings with prayers again led by the *Imam*. In some other cases, the elders slowly dispersed, leaving us with the *Alkalo* or leading us off to meet the youth leaders in the village.

In terms of an action plan, it was important for each of the people in the team to identify and link up with at least one key informant, a target group link person – codenamed ‘village contact’ and to fill in a checklist which we discussed in ensuing debriefing sessions. It was often with this contact person that we discussed possible dates of returning to the village either to make a schedule, or make an action plan, or to actually start fieldwork. In many cases, the contact person had a mobile phone number, which we took down. We always tried to go to their homes before leaving the village on the day of the village introductory meetings. The next plan of action varied by location and was largely shaped by the individual(s) we were working with as contact people. Sometimes our next plan of action was to meet individual youths in their compounds and explain the study to them, or to meet a group of already sensitised youths mobilised into a group that was waiting for us, or to recruit and take consent of a group to whom the contact person had already explained some aspects of the study, or to recruit adults and elders into different activities including key informant sessions, interviews or focus group discussions, or just to organise the schedule. Work in each village proceeded differently. However, all the necessary points developing from a village introductory meeting were listed on a checklist that we discussed and

monitored to see how much ground had been covered or was necessary to cover in a particular area (see figure 1.18 below).

Figure 1.18 Checklist for village introductory meetings

VILLAGE INTRODUCTORY MEETING

Location: _____ Date: _____

Team members: _____

Those met: _____

Comments: _____

AIM	YES	NO
1. Meet the Alkalo	▽	▽
2. Meet the other village leaders	▽	▽
3. Identify contact person for youths	▽	▽
4. Introduce the study	▽	▽
5. Get permission for the study	▽	▽
6. Recruit some key informants/ participants	▽	▽
7. Identify places for focus group discussion	▽	▽
8. Assess local language needs	▽	▽
9. Start on calendar/ schedule	▽	▽
10. Cook?/ meals?/ drinks?/ attaya?/ shop?	▽	▽
11. Assess transport needs	▽	▽
12. AOB _____		
13. AOB _____		

Please RETURN to Stella Nyanzi or Ousman Bah at the end of the session.

1.4.2 Participatory rapid appraisals

In the early stages of the fieldwork, I employed participatory research and action (PRA) tools (Meyer 2000, Hart and Bond 1995, Burkey 1983, Holland and Blackburn 1998, Chambers 1992, 1994a, b) specifically social mapping to identify spaces where youths interacted socially, sexually or sought reproductive health services. I also used PRA to help me synthesize my initial analyses by presenting raw-findings to key informants and seeking their feedback prior to publishing the final results.

1.4.3 Formal qualitative methods

Formal qualitative research methods of data collection complemented the above techniques (Bernard 1994).

1.4.3.1 Focus group discussions

In order to get going with fieldwork, and create a measure of rapport with the youths and other study sub-population groups, focus group discussions were among the very first formally organised research activities. After the village meetings, we returned to each village for a round of explaining the study, soliciting consent from willing members, and recruitment into gender- and language-specific focus group discussions. Throughout, we worked with the village youth leaders, or otherwise the village chiefs to meet youths. Selection of the initial focus group participants was mainly guided by the youth leaders whom we trusted to know the youths in their vicinities well. The only selection criteria I offered was:

- (a) youths who are able to express their views in a group format
- (b) they must be willing to participate
- (c) they must belong to the village.

Credit was sometimes given to the youth leaders for coordinating the discussions, indicating the solidarity among youths in some locations as well as their belief in and support for their elected youth leaders. Working together with the youth leaders, and within the established village leadership organogram relating to youths, certainly had its advantages. These included the faster identification of potential study participants, faster organisation of the groups and activities, more effective recruitment and consenting of willing members, more appropriate coordination of different phases of the study, greater ownership of the research process by study participants, higher enthusiasm for the discussions, etc. It was easier for participants to be themselves because they felt that this was their study where they were valued for who they were, and their uniqueness and differences which were already known to their colleagues were important. Instead of being a hindrance, it enhanced debate and discussion. The disadvantage of giving the local youth leaders

the upper hand in locating potential participants and guiding the eventual selection was mainly the lack of transparency about selection criteria among some youth leaders, evidence of coaching of participants in how to respond to particular questions, and miscommunication about expected output – which could have raised false hopes about possibilities of financial payment for those who spent time in the focus group discussions. My research team tactfully responded to such issues as they arose.

Repeat focus group discussions were organised around social-cultural divides that shaped and governed conversation, communication and interaction between the sexes, different age groups, ethnicities, or whatever other relevant social categorisation. Focus groups were vital tools for gathering information about the collective experience and social norms as constructed, practiced or perceived at group level (Kreuger and Casey 2000, Morgan 1997, Kitzinger 1994, 1995, Stewart and Shamdasani 1992, Kreuger 1988). Strengths of focus group discussions include the ability to gather a range of responses, obtaining information about norms or socially approved behaviour, the researcher can build on group dynamics to assess reliability of responses, and the ability to generate debate from the group. Weaknesses include potential for influence and bias by dominant discussants, possibility of silencing unacceptable opinions, moderator bias, not ideal for exploring individual experiences or fostering confidentiality.

1.4.3.2 Individual in-depth interviews

I conducted formal in-depth interviews in order to further investigate the individual experience of particular themes that emerged during the group sessions. I held a series of follow-up interviews with particular informative participants to pursue emergent themes. All formal interviews were in the participant's preferred language. The strengths of in-depth interviews include flexibility to reorder questions in response to the topic flow, allows probing to further expand a response, can produce confidential information particularly if rapport and trust is established, allows the respondent to provide detailed nuanced answers, and generates detailed information about a subject. Weaknesses of this method include lack of standardisation which may affect reliability of

data, requires relatively longer time, the data are not easily coded into pre-assigned themes, tape recording may require considerable time to transcribe and analyse, and they generate a large volume of data. I attended all interviews where I was allowed, together with a trained multi-lingual research assistant. In cases where participants preferred only a male interviewer, either Ousman or Sulayman represented me. Formal interviews were recorded on audio tape, transcribed verbatim, translated from the local languages into English and entered into computer. Field notes from participant observation and PRA sessions were also entered into computer.

1.4.4 Literature review

The literature review (Cooper 1998, Hart 1998, Fink 1998) informed the research about what was presently written about the main study themes found during fieldwork; situated study findings within wider issues in the Gambian context, and how they related to other African experiences; and provided background information about the historical, social, economic, cultural, spiritual developments in diverse youth subcultures, sexualities and reproductive health. Literature also played a key role in the development of subsequent data collection directions – in accordance with the grounded theory approach (Dick 2002). As the fieldwork data accumulated, I compared them with findings in the literature. Subsequently I adjusted the next research questions to enrich analysis of the differences or similarities. Although the literature review was emergent (Dick 2002) depending on themes generated within the data, prior background reading provided the models that were necessary to make sense of the data (Glaser 1978). It was important that the literature review not only developed in response to the data, but that it was also a potential source of disconfirming evidence to the emerging theory. Therefore, I treated the literature also as data for further comparison. Furthermore, the literature review included content analysis of popular culture in the form of discussion, review and enactment of policy statements and documents related to youth sexuality and health.

Sourcing for published historical records about The Gambia, was a main challenge for me, even when I had access to some of the best Africanist libraries in the world¹⁶. Writing about the state of recorded historical material that he found in The Gambia on his first visit in 1946, Gamble 2002:4 states:

'I visited Commissioner's offices up-river. In many places I discovered that old files were being destroyed by white ants (termites), and I made copious notes from them on local history, law, etc. Copies of these files (33 in number) were deposited in the Senior Commissioner's office and eventually ended up in the National Archives.'

As he later repeatedly reports in the same volume that there were no xerox copy machines in those days, it is commendable that he did hand copy or type-write some aspects of these records. However, the weakness of such a copied record is that it was principally selective and tailored to meet this colonial anthropologist's research topic. What about those other aspects in the report that were not relevant to his research but are vital to the historical records of the local community? What about those that he did not copy because they were already known to him, but will forever remain unknown to scholars of the present regime? What sort of access conditions are currently attached to accessing these copies he made? But more importantly for Gambians and scholars interested in studying The Gambia, what happened to the remains of the 'old files [that] were being destroyed by white ants?' Did Emeritus Professor David P. Gamble dump them back in the same termite-infested room, the same white-ant-trodden path that he found them? And why not? After all he had extracted the 'copious notes from them', gotten what he had use for and thus the files were no longer his business! Did anyone attempt to reclaim, preserve or maintain what was left of those precious invaluable old files, after the termites had had a share, and the colonial anthropologist had also had his share? Where are the remaining skeletons of the original files – no matter how bereft of any flesh they might be?

¹⁶ I had access to the British Library, the libraries of the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of Cape Town Library, University College London library, Nordiska Afrika Institutet library, Senate House, the CODESRIA Library, and the University of Birmingham library among others.

Of course 'One leg is better than none'. And so, as a contemporary scholar of The Gambia, I should have a measure of gratitude for the copies that 'eventually ended up in the National archives'. And yet I find myself wishing – if only these copies were known about, and readily accessible to those who would have need for them. Starin (2007a) examines the complexities surrounding accessing published writings about The Gambia.

Not only was historical literature hard to access, but some of the content has been pointed out to be erroneous by other scholars of the country. Gamble (2004), produced an entire fifty-six paged volume devoted to Errors, confusions, misinterpretations in writings about The Gambia. In an earlier volume, (Gamble 2002:161-164), he illustrated how '...for nearly seventy years we would seem to have had a piece of erroneous information taught to Gambian schoolchildren...' (page 164). He illustrates how a doubtful piece of information was perpetuated over time by citing nine different authors and pieces repeated the same misinformation for decades in the history of Gambian literature.

1.4.5 Policy review

Lastly, I reviewed policy about youth development, sexual and reproductive health in The Gambia by analysing content of documents, policy statements, and media presentations; and interviewing policy makers and implementers, as well as people who deliver services in these fields.

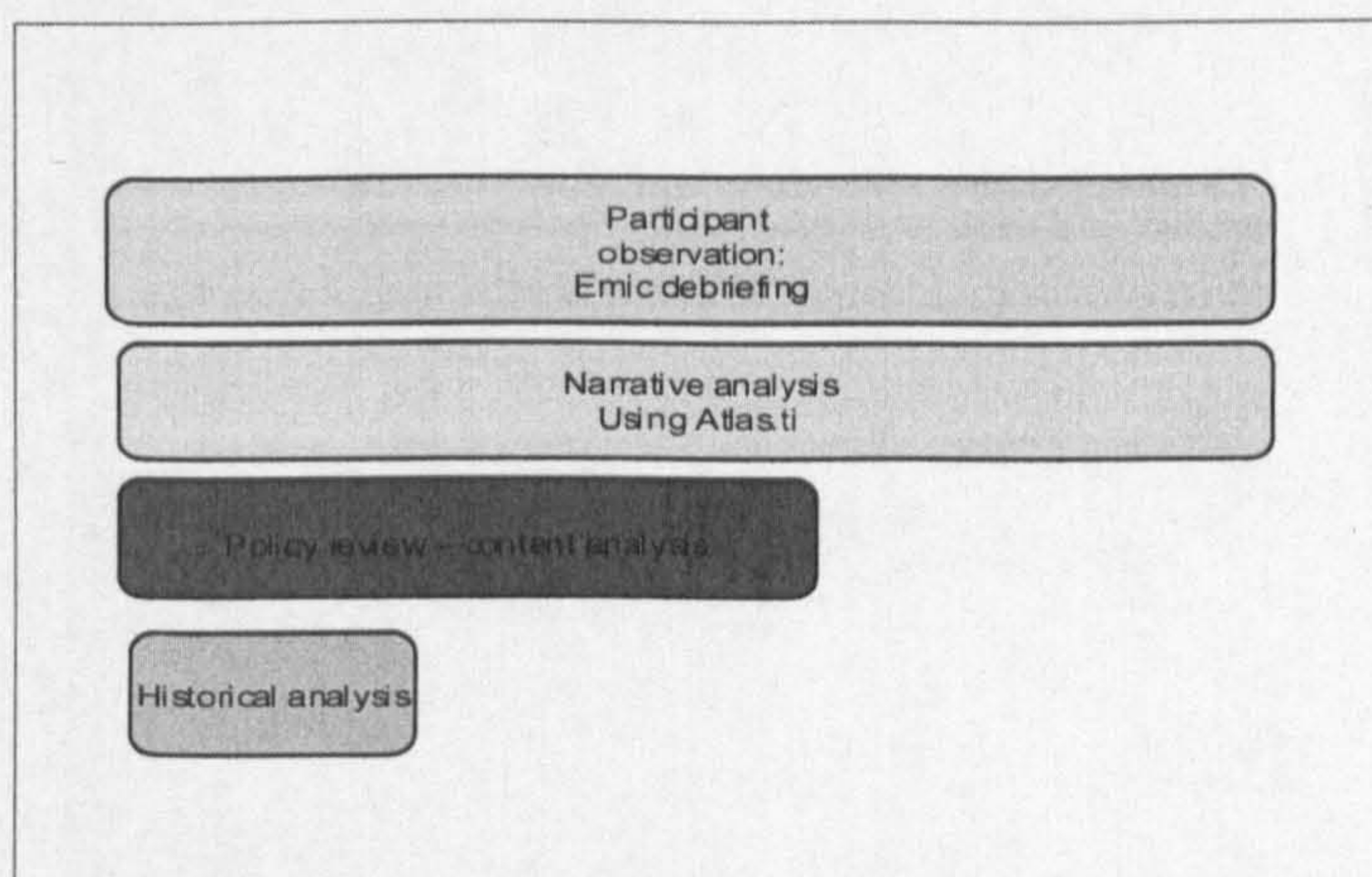
1.5 Data analysis

Analysis of data was at two levels: the immediate field-based analysis and the more formalized analysis which necessitated leaving the field so as to temporarily distance myself from the effects of immersion into what I had observed. Preliminary data analysis occurred in the field as I wrote up field notes, considered recurrent themes and how they related to diverse concepts, as well as their interrelationships. I had regular debriefing sessions with my research assistants who were

not only fluent in the local languages, but also lived the reality I observed. These discussions helped me verify my interpretations and understandings of the social processes under observation. Sometimes verification occurred when I was with key informants whereby I further probed about seeming contradictions in the emergent theory and either confirmed or disconfirmed my initial analyses.

I employed discourse or narrative analysis of textual data, and content analysis of policy statements. All qualitative data were subjected to narrative analysis using Atlas.ti (Scientific Software Development, Berlin), a computer software package designed to analyse volumes of qualitative data and based on the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As elaborated in chapter 2, I coded texts and observations, using inductively generated codes to label important themes and topics. Coded segments were compared within and between data sets, thus generating higher-order generalizations (Miles and Huberman 1994, Fielding and Lee 1998). Review of policy documents, texts and other popular culture predominantly employed content analysis. Quantitative data generated during the PRA activities were statistically analysed using Epi Info 6.1 (Centers for Disease Control). All the measurable data that were captured on manila charts during PRA activities were entered into a database in MS Access. I used the query tool within this computer package to generate simple statistics and analyse frequency tabulations.

Figure 1.19 My data analysis strategies



My early exposure to Africanist scholars through the CODESRIA, AGI and OSSREA¹⁷ opened my eyes to the urgency of questioning received knowledge about Africa and her peoples. Thus an important component of my data analysis appropriated the lens of historiography whereby I concentrated on critically engaging with the printed word pertaining to my study. As I reviewed literature, I unpacked the unseen power stories within and behind the script: who was writing? Why were they writing? Why did they write as they did? What was their gender? How did it affect the story and narration? How did it colour what they saw or didn't see, what they heard or missed, what they understood, misunderstood or didn't understand altogether? What nationality, race, skin colour, etc, were they? From what political position did they write? And to what end? Who spoke to them? Who taught them?... Rather than swallowing all received knowledge about The Gambia, and taking it at face value as the gospel truth, I analysed the inner stories so that I could make informed choices about how to apply the information from these literature texts to my own ethnographic research. Since the literature were informing the evolving research questions, I critically examined them before making choices about what aspects to adopt or apply to my study, which ones to further investigate using empirical research, and which to spew out.

1.6 Ethical considerations

Clearance and approval for the science and ethics of the study were obtained from the Ethics Committee of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (see appendix 6). Local approval from The Gambia was obtained from the National Council of Arts and Culture – a government body responsible for the clearance and approval of all anthropological and ethnographic studies conducted in the country (see appendix 7). Initiation of interaction with the local leaders at the relevant sub-levels of administration was effected during the pilot stage of fieldwork which ran from January to April 2004.

¹⁷ Prof. Adebayo Olukoshi of CODESRIA, Prof Collins Airirhenbuwa - my resource person during the SIDA/CODESRIA Initiative on Social Science and HIV/AIDS, Prof. Anne Mager – my mentor during the AGI writing associateship at UCT.

Measures to ensure confidentiality of information provided included designating an identification number to each participant instead of actual names, utilizing pseudonyms when publishing results, saving all documents under password, storing hard copies and scripts under lock and key, training the research assistants in the importance of confidentiality, and advance preparation of private venues to hold discussions.

After sensitisation and recruitment, participants were given a chance to consent to participate in the study, or refuse. Both the information sheet and consent form (appendix 5 and 4 respectively) were piloted. A box for thumb-prints was added for illiterate participants who were the majority.

Chapter 2: Abstracting from data using grounded theory – the heuristic role of sexual scripts

As intimated in chapter 1, grounded theory means different things to diverse scholars. Therefore it is important that I clarify the process of analysis, in particular how I abstracted from generalized themes derived from codes drawn based upon the data and thereby developed the emic theories.

This research process was inductive throughout, even though I applied sexual script theory. Rather than using a deductive approach, I applied aspects of the 'sexual script' metaphor to my developing grounded theory. There is no contradiction between claiming that the research is inductive, based on grounded theory and also using sexual scripts¹. This chapter spells out how I did this.

In the first section I describe the development of this dissertation's hermeneutic unit of analysis in Atlas.ti, starting from the entry of textual, graphic and sound data through the different coding levels, and memoing, to creating categories and down to the grounded theories. The following section explores the complexity of the label 'sexual scripts'. Thereafter I explain how I applied sexual script(ing) theories to organise my super-codes, and categories, as well as to formulate and test for relationships within and among code families. I focus on highlighting that the sexual script approach is situated within my wider theoretical positioning as a sexuality scholar.

2.1 The analysis: a descriptive analysis of my hermeneutic unit in Atlas.ti

In addition to transcriptions of the formal interviews and focus group discussions, the field notes from me and the research assistants were entered into a word processor, formatted into textual data which were assigned as primary documents to a hermeneutic unit² in Atlas.ti 4.1 (Scientific Software Development, Berlin). This is a computer software programme designed to assist in the analysis of large volumes of qualitative data. Atlas.ti is based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Strauss and

¹ Other contemporary sexuality scholars also combined the two (including Seal and Ehrhardt 2003, Lengwe-Kunda 2008, Seal et al. 2000).

² A project containing textual, graphic, and/ sound data for coding and analysis is referred to as hermeneutic unit. It is the space in which the different processes occur and are stored.

Corbin 1990). Therefore it was well-suited to my aim of exploring local emic understandings of youth sub-cultures, sexualities and sexual health. According to di Gregorio (2003), the advantages of Atlas.ti include:

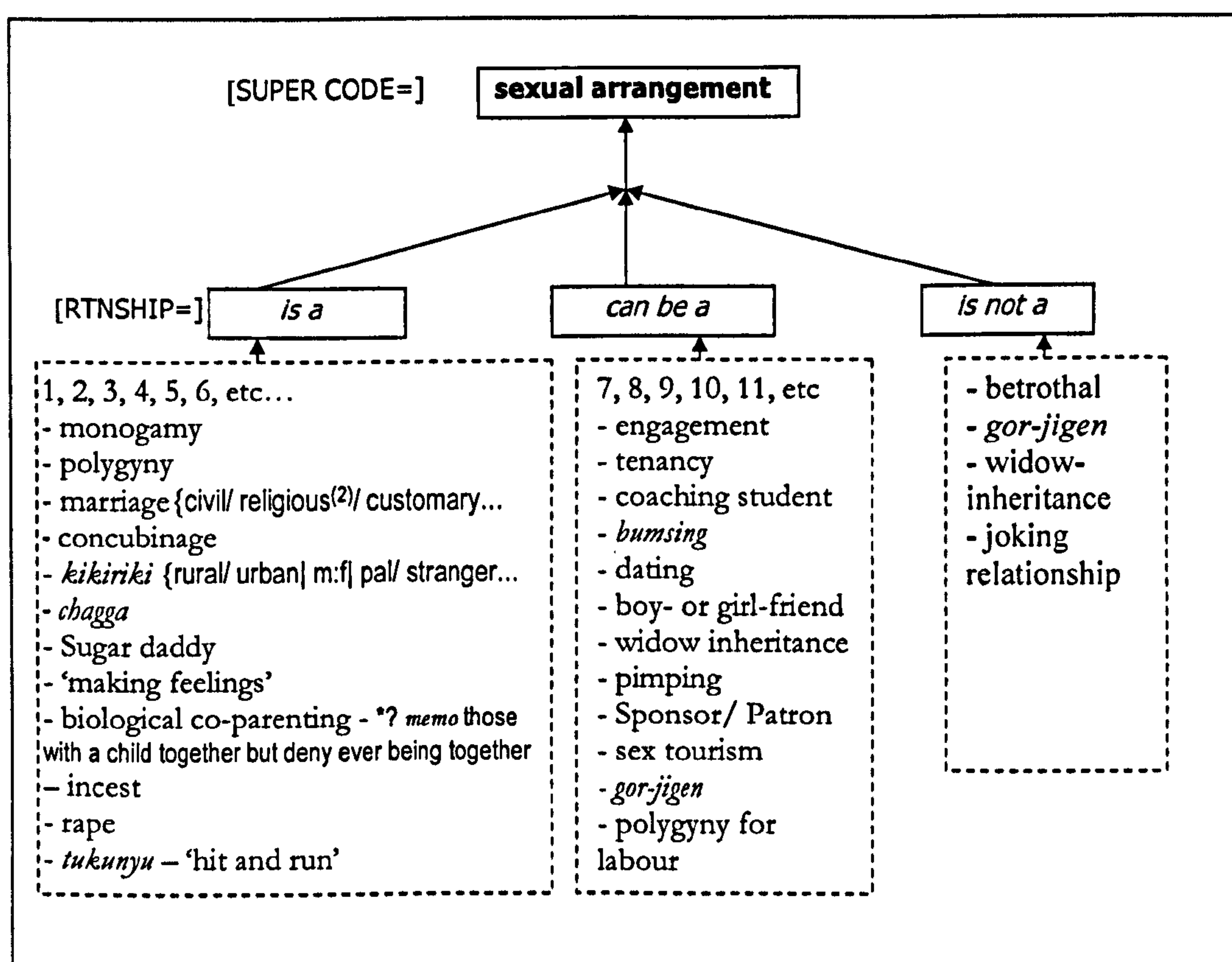
- 1) eliminating problems of managing large amounts of paper produced by cut and paste,
- 2) coding and alternative re-coding of the same data – “slicing the cake in another way” is made easier,
- 3) keeping an audit trail of the analysis process,
- 4) making transparent the links and relationships in the text through seeing hyper text in a network view,
- 5) enabling research teams to jointly work on one data set, discussing coding and analysis issues.

In order to develop the analysis, it was imperative to get immersed in the data through an iterative process of reading, coding, memoing and questioning the textual data. While coding is about disaggregating the data, memoing is aimed at synthesis of like parts. In this process, patterns and relationships embedded within the data emerge.

During the first level of analysis, each of the primary documents were subjected to rigorous thematic coding. Here, I adopted Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) three forms of coding – open, axial and selective (see also Miles and Huberman 1984). As I read through the texts, I broke down segments into quotations that were then coded by theme. Each new code was added to the hermeneutic unit’s code list. A specific quotation was related to at least one code, although segments rich with encoded meaning could have many codes. Thereafter when the code list had matured, the codes themselves became an object of analysis. A few codes clearly had overarching importance and became central concepts around which the analysis emerged. In some cases, gaps identified in these code families necessitated further investigation of a theme with new research questions. In my code families, I mainly developed parent codes, along with members of their family, related codes, contradictory codes, using operators available as command syntaxes in Atals.ti (see figure 2.1 for an illustration). These became categories, or super-codes that were key to relationships within and between other codes. In addition some codes were collapsed, some winnowed because they were not widely applicable, and some others were elaborated or further broken down. Thus when the hermeneutic unit had matured, all new data provided ingredients for building the emerging generalisations, and also examining emerging relationships between the codes. Ultimately, each

super code was embedded within a dense network of other relationships, families, sets and interactions which were accessible through the network-editor of the hermeneutic unit in Atlas.ti. Lofland and Lofland (1995) differentiate these two phases as initial and focussed coding, respectively. As the research progressed, the complexity of the research theme became very apparent from the increasing density, layering, levels, interactions, and relationships of the codes in specific networks of items and their analysis in the hermeneutic unit.

Figure 2: An example of a simple code structure



Alongside this process, I developed a growing corpus of memos. While some memos involved recording insights about the data, others were notes about possible synthesis of the results of coding exercises, some concerned developing specific arguments emergent within the data, and some were beginnings of the writing process. Memoing was also important when higher levels of abstraction were made while scrolling through the data, for example when a quotation conflicted (sharply) with emergent patterns. (Cf. Lofland

and Lofland 1995 who outline three kinds of memos namely elemental, sorting and integrating). Many of my memos were interpretative hunches, speculation about possible interactions between and within codes. I first articulated the evidence of contradiction of meaning and ambivalence within themes and emerging theories in my memos.

At the height of specific categories reaching saturation, local patterns and processes of understanding youth sexualities were evident. Sexual scripts embedded within emic articulation and performance clearly emerged from the data. I focussed my analysis on the dominant categories. As an organising framework, this approach fit well with the emergent and iterative data from individual interviews, focus group discussions, chat groups and participant observation.

2.2 The ambivalence of sexual scripts

Explorations such as this almost inevitably begin with promise and conclude with apology. What we offer is not a theory of sexual behaviour, but a conceptual apparatus with which to examine development and experience of the sexual. An examination must inevitably take us beyond inarticulate permanence of the body to the changing and diverse meanings and uses of the sexual. In doing so, we see the sexual not in traditional terms of biological imperatives, but in terms of the natural imperatives of the human: our natural dependence upon social meanings – upon symbol and metaphor – to give life to 'the body without organs'. Simon and Gagnon (1984:60).

"Sexual scripting" was never intended to be a comprehensive theory of human sexuality, at least not one that could pretend to provide meaningful understanding of all forms of sexual behaviour, let alone the multiple uses to be found in what appear to be identical forms of sexual behaviour. To the contrary, what we attempted was to provide a conceptual apparatus that might have utility in examining specific patterns of behaviour observed in the context of pervasive social change and concurrent levels of individuation. The imposition of overarching generalizations can only further obscure the current pluralized sexual landscape. A scripting approach, at best, is not a terminal point but merely a beginning, a way of charting what must remain a complex and changing landscape of uses and meanings. (Simon and Gagnon 2003:495)

The label 'sexual scripts' is ambivalent. There is no simple answer to the question, 'What does "sexual scripts" mean?' In the literature sexual scripts are variously described; including as a 'concept', 'metaphor' (Irvine 2003:489), 'scripting approach,' 'conceptual approach,' 'scripting perspective' (Simon and Gagnon 2003:491) 'scripting theory' (Simon and Gagnon 2003:493), 'theoretical approach,' 'conceptual apparatus' (Simon and Gagnon 1986:98) .

The notion of 'scripts' is diversely applied in varying academic disciplines. Drama, literature, rhetoric studies, journalism, graphics, cognitive psychology, critical social theory, and sexuality studies all employ different nuances of the script. And in order to avoid getting misunderstood, it is important to clarify what one means when using it.

Frith and Kitzinger (2001:211) distinguish between two approaches³:

'There are two different approaches to "scripts", one based in cognitive psychology (e.g. Abelson 1981, Mandler 1984, Markus and Zajonc 1983, Schank and Abelson 1977), and the other based in sociology (e.g. Gagnon and Simon 1973). While the former has, with a few exceptions, ignored the role of "scripts" in sexual activity, the latter deals explicitly (and exclusively) with issues of sexuality'.

The concept of sexual scripts is usually referenced to the book Sexual Conduct: the social sources of human sexuality authored by John H. Gagnon and William Simon in 1973⁴. Alternatively, the later works of these two scholars are sourced⁵. Gagnon (1990:204) highlights that although there are critical theoretical distinctions between the cognitive psychology and sociological approaches to script theories, many authors are not explicit about their chosen approach, even though distinguishing between the two may be important to some contexts and the formulation of research questions and methods. It is possible that this oversight is

³ This is a rather simplistic categorisation of sub-discipline approach to scripts. My reading of the literature about sexual scripts actually reveals many examples of cognitive psychologists particularly feminists who also research about sexualities (e.g. Rose and Frieze 1993, Kurth et al. 2000, Hyde and Oliver 2000), or cognitive psychotherapists who discuss the relevance of sexual scripts in therapy sessions (e.g. Jones and Hostler 2001). Nevertheless, it begins to unravel the complexity and ambivalence of working with the metaphor of scripts.

⁴ According to Frith and Kitzinger (2001:211) 'Most sexuality researchers seem to cite Gagnon and Simon's version of script theory (e.g. Edgar and Fitzpatrick 1993, Hyde and Olive 2000:63, Kelly and Kalichman 1995, Reed and Weinberg 1984). Some sexuality researchers do, however, cite the cognitive psychological approaches of Abelson (1981), Schank and Ableson (1977) or Markus and Zajonc (1985) as their theoretical influence (e.g. Abraham and Sheeran 1994, Kahn et al. 1994). Some sexuality researchers cite both versions without commenting on any distinctions between them (e.g Popovich et al. 1995, Rose and Frieze 1993).'

⁵ Irvine (2003) lists the important literature across two decades articulating William Simon and John Gagnon's development of the sexual script concept (including Simon and Gagnon 1968, 1969, 1984, 1987a, b, Gagnon and Simon 1973, 1987, Gagnon 1973, Simon 1973, 1996, Lauman and Gagnon 1994, Lauman et al. 1994).

an indication that some sexuality scholars are unaware of the different theoretical underpinnings of these different uses of sexual scripts.

Furthermore according to Frith and Kitzinger (2001:212), 'research using other theoretical approaches (e.g. social learning, or voice-relationship or life-span developments) is often cited unproblematically as offering evidence for script theory.' They give the example of Kahn and Andreoli Mathie (2000) using a discourse analytic study in support of sexual script theory... although 'some discourse analysts (Edwards 1995, 1997) have claimed that these two approaches are incompatible.'

Ambivalence of sexual scripts is heightened by the frequency of scholars and writers using the label without providing their definition, or even contextualising its use to their specific study. This leads to it being replaced with other similar, but different terms. The ease of interchanging sexual scripts with other terms is captured well by critics:

Indeed, although the terminology of "sexual scripts" is now commonplace in (especially feminist) psychological writing on sexuality, its underlying theory is often rather less apparent. Not only are two disparate sources of 'script theory' evoked without comment, but also many authors appear not to distinguish between the theoretical apparatus invoked by "scripts" and other related terms that attach social meanings to sexuality, such as "representations", "stereotypes", "norms," "social roles," "gender socialization patterns," "social constructions" and, of particular relevance to the current paper, "discourses". Such terms are often elided and used interchangeably' (Frith and Kitzinger 2001:212).

For example Rostosky and Travis (2000:201-202), quoted in Frith and Kitzinger (2001:212), '...use "scripts" apparently interchangeably with the terms "social messages", "received wisdom", "current social constructions", and "discourse about menopause and women's sexuality in general". Likewise, Kurth et al. (2000) use interchangeably the terms "cultural beliefs" (pp 323) "dominant sexual scripts" (pp 324) and "dominant discourse of society" (pp 324).'

2.2.1 Why the ambivalence?

Sexual scripts were first conceived as a social learning approach to sexuality, and later transformed into a social constructionist framework⁶ in response to changes in the intellectual context of the social studies of sexuality due to the influences of feminism, gay and lesbian studies, self-psychology and social theory (Gagnon and Simon 1973, Simon and Gagnon 2003:491).

One of the main contributory factors to this ambivalence is the progressive development and transformation within the thinking of the two scholars who formulated sexual scripts. Their definition of the concept mutated with time, reflection, and in response to the changing scholarly environment informing sexuality studies. According to Frith and Kitzinger (2001:210), 'Gagnon and Simon have produced various renditions of script theory, both jointly and individually.' Consequently, depending on the version of sexual script concept that one works with, scholars may be referring to and/ or applying different nuances of the sexual script metaphor.

'Sexual scripts' developed out of the 'need to make sense out of the legacy of prior sex research (from Freud to Kinsey) and the need to create and rationalize a new sociological tradition of sex research' (Simon and Gagnon 2003:491)⁷. The central notion of sexual script theory is that 'sexuality is *learned* from culturally available messages that define what 'counts' as sex, how to recognise sexual situations, and what to do in sexual encounters...' (Frith and Kitzinger 2001:210).

Sexual scripts emerged from Simon and Gagnon's (2003:491) 'rejection of explanations rooted in biological naturalism and sociological functionalism'⁸. Frith and Kitzinger (2001:210) describe it as a

⁶ Simon and Gagnon (2003:494) explain that, 'This evolution in thinking could be described as moving from a *social learning* position towards a *social constructionist* position, a shift in emphasis that viewed both cultural production and subjective response as something more than factors reflecting the requirements of either the powers of the means of production (the classic Marxian position) or of society as a coherent and coercive reality (the classic Durkheimian position). These developments were clearly contextualized by changes in the surrounding intellectual landscape as dramatic as those occurring elsewhere in the surrounding social order' [emphasis in original].

⁷ Their theorisation was set against traditional Freudian thinking, Post Freudian theorists specifically Kohut and Stoller, social psychologists, as well as Durkheimian thinking and classic functionalists.

⁸ According to Simon and Gagnon (2003:492), 'Sexual drives, impulses or instincts struck us as misunderstandings of the socially acquired character of sexual life – for us the phenomenological experience of either sexual desire or the desire for sex was a learned way to label their interests within the context of specific interpersonal and intrapsychic conditions. In our view there is no sexual wisdom that derives from the relatively constant physical body. It is the historical situation of the body that gives the body its sexual (as well as all other) meanings. While the

'radical departure from mainstream sexology and sexual research which accounts for sexuality in relation to biological "drives" and/ or individual needs'. The sexual script approach to sexuality studies offered instead a much more clearly social approach in place of the reductionist, biological, evolutionary or individualistic models which many researchers are increasingly critical of. According to Irvine (2003:490), the sexual script was an important re-conceptualisation of sexuality as a social process rather than a biological imperative; '... the script placed sexuality in a broader social context and historicized individual sexual behaviour...' (Irvine 2003:489).

Furthermore, sexual scripts were based on Simon and Gagnon's critique of the functionalist belief that sexuality had fixed social functions or purposes derivable from transcultural collective or supraindividual purposes (Simon and Gagnon 2003:492). Thus sexuality researchers have variously applied sexual scripts to their scholarship⁹.

The literature also reveals that sexual scripts are applied in clinical or therapeutic settings to intervene in the sexual lives of individuals or couples. According to Jones and Hostler (2001:125), 'Sexual script theory is increasingly seen as a standard tool in clinical application for the treatment of sexual disorders' (see also Leiblum and Rosen 2000, Atwood and Dershowitz 1992). As an applied tool, they are used to uncover the motivations and understandings that shape client sexual experience. Extensive cognitive psychotherapy and repeat counselling sessions are based on assumptions that sexual meanings are socially constructed, thus it is able to work with therapy clients to 'deconstruct useless or damaging sexual scripts'. The aim of the clinical therapy is to find, name, focus on and experience alternative sexual scripts; thereby intentionally changing from one to another form of sexual script.

commonsensical view of sex is that it is a spontaneous and ungovernable form of behaviour that presses against social norms, in our view the sexual takes on its shape and meaning from its social character. Even though most actual sexual activity in contemporary societies goes on in private settings, often devoid of apparent social costuming, the sexual encounter remains a profoundly social act in its enactment and even more so in its antecedents and consequences. Implicit and explicit audiences (i.e., the self and others as audiences) are present in every sexual encounter and the judgements and views of these audiences are considered, even if only in their denial."

⁹ Frith and Kitzinger (2001:210) sample a range of sexuality studies that appropriate sexual scripts: 'Script theory has been applied to women's sexuality from adolescence (Reid and Bing 2000) to old age (Rostosky and Travis (2000) and used to explain women's disinterest in sex (e.g. Masters, Johnson and Kolodny 1995); both sexes' behaviour on first dates (Pryor and Merluzzi 1985, Rose and Frieze 1993); the sequencing of sexual behaviour leading to intercourse (Edgar and Fitzpatrick 1993, Geer and Broussard 1990); sexual harassment (Kurth, Spiller and Travis 2000, Popovich et al. 1995); and rape (Jackson 1978/1995); Kahn, Andreoli Mathie and Torgler 1994), including acquaintance rape (Donat and White 2000).

However, although they acknowledge the potential of sexual scripts to aid therapeutic processes within clinical settings, Jones and Hostler (2001) are also critical of the potential incompatibility with practitioners who believe in specific sexual standards. They caution that although sexual script theory has utility as a clinical tool for the Christian clinician, it is also complex, ambivalent and should be used with caution lest it leads to the application of illegitimate treatment goals or even the utilization of morally questionable scripting interventions to create client movement toward desirable goals. Based on their belief in appropriate sexual conduct established within the limits of Christian ethos and morality, they question the extent to which Christian clinicians can go with the permissiveness encouraged by the sexual script theory, as well as the notion of human autonomy to self-define or self-identify.

2.3 Defining sexual scripts

Given this diversity, the question, 'what are sexual scripts' begs an answer. Below I present some of the different definitions available in the literature and relevant to my application of scripts in this analysis.

'Scripts are a metaphor for conceptualizing the production of behaviour within social life' (Simon and Gagnon 1984:53, 1986:98).

'All social behaviour is scripted' (Gagnon 1977:6).

'A script is a cognitive device that guides actions and makes sense of behaviour' (Jones and Hostler 2001:123).

'The idea of a *script*, a device for guiding action and for understanding it, is a metaphor drawn from the theatre. Viewing conduct as scripted is a way of organising our thinking about behaviour. Scripts are the plans that people may have in their heads for what they are doing and what they are going to do, as well as being devices for remembering what they have done in the past. Scripts justify actions which are in accord with them and cause us to question those which are not. Scripts specify, like blueprints, the whos, whats, whens, where, and whys for given types of activity. As we act, we think about what we are doing, the people we are doing it with, the places where we do it, the times when it is done, and the reasons why we – and the persons we are with – are doing it. We use scripts to choose courses of action, to check our behaviour against our plans, and to recall the prior concrete steps in our behaviour through thinking about the elements in the script. A script is simpler than the activity we perform, often more limited and

schematic. It is like a blueprint or roadmap or recipe, giving direction, but not specifying everything that must be done. Regardless of its sketchiness, the script is often more important than concrete acts. It is our script that we carry from action to action, modified by our concrete acts, but not replaced by them'. (Gagnon 1977:6)

A person's sexual script is one's subjective understanding of one's sexuality and how this affects the choice of sexual actions and the subsequent experience of these sexual actions (Jones and Hostler 2001:120).

'An individual's sexual script defines the repertoire of what is appropriate and accepted in terms of behaviour, status, roles and modes of expression of one's sexual self' (Reed and Weinberg 1984).

According to Atwood and Dershowitz (1992), sexual scripts are the blue prints for behaviour, specifying who one will have sex with, what one will allow him or herself to do sexually, when one will have sex, and why one will engage in sexual behaviour.

Also known as event schemata¹⁰, scripts are memory structures well known in cognitive psychology. Focussing on the human mind in this perspective, scripts are important to the analysis of the representation of knowledge in human memory and its subsequent retrieval in order to act upon. Dealing with memory, and how it drives patterns of behaviour, sequencing of events, etc, scripts are useful for example in marketing research, consumer studies, popularity and trend theories because they could result in accurate predictions of customer attitudes and judgements (see e.g. Erasmus, Boshoff, Rousseau 2002). Thus sexuality researchers who examine the sequence of activities, events or cues in sexual interactions are adopting this perspective.

Gagnon et al. (1982:46) clarify the two-pronged role of sexual scripts: 'On one hand, our scripts function as a plan or code for directing our sexual actions and anticipating the responses of a partner; while at the same time these scripts determine our emotional responses and meanings we attribute to our sexual encounters...' In other words, sexual scripts are like pointers saying to behave sexually, do this or that with

¹⁰ This is one of four types of schemata including 1) self schemata – which is information about one's own personality, appearance, behaviour; 2) person schemata – which focuses on traits and behaviours common to people types; 3) Role schemata or person-in-situation schemata – which is about people and their typical behaviour in specific social events; and 4) event schemata or scripts – which is knowledge about the expected sequence of events in a given situation (for details see Tylor, Cronin and Hansen 1991).

this person or that one, in this place or other, at these times in such a way. In addition, sexual scripts also interpret the sexual actions or gestures to mean this or that depending on the specific context.

A key question of the scripting approach is, 'What does sexuality represent?' (Simon and Gagnon 2003:495). They describe the sexual scripts 'as an unreflective effort at a "grounded theory" of the sexual [emphasis in original]' (Simon and Gagnon 2003:491).

Sexual scripts thus highlight the diversity of sexual meanings within specific contexts. I found that they are a powerful tool to capture emic understandings of what the sexual means.

There are three levels of sexual scripts (Simon and Gagnon 1986, 1973, 2003):

1. Cultural scenarios => instruction in collective meanings
2. Interpersonal scripts => the application of specific cultural scenarios by an individual in a specific context
3. intrapsychic scripts => the management of desires as experienced by the individual.

2.3.1 Cultural scenarios

Also referred to as the 'intersubjective cultural surround' (Simon and Gagnon 2003:491), or 'social context' (Jones and Hostler 2001:123), cultural scenarios operate at the group level of shared meanings, values and specific roles¹¹. According to Irvine (2003:489), 'cultural scenarios are collective patterns that specify appropriate sexual goals, objects and relationships. They are historically and culturally specific guidelines for how, when, where, why and with whom to be sexual.' Often, cultural scenarios tap into predominant discourses about sexualities. Thus sexual scripts are influenced by key social institutions such as the government, church, educational system, work place (Jones and Hostler 2001:124). Individuals subscribe to diverse cultural scenarios in different contexts. For example Simon and Gagnon (1986, 1984) discuss how broader changes in family life, careers, values and definitions of the lifecycle profoundly

¹¹ According to Simon and Gagnon (1986:98), 'Cultural scenarios essentially instruct in the narrative requirements of specific roles; they provide for the understandings that make role entry, performance, and/ or exit plausible for both self and others: providing the who and what of both past and future without which the present remains uncertain and fragile. The enactment of virtually all roles then, must reflect either directly or indirectly the contests of appropriate cultural scenarios.'

influence sexual scripts. At different stages of a relationship varied sexual scripts are employed (Simon and Gagnon 1986).

Because cultural scenarios are often shared at the collective level, the actors engaged in specific interactions should know what their different roles are, the expected course of action, and what meaning(s) follow thereof within their shared context of operation. Different scripts have distinct prescriptions and/ or proscriptions for particular actors. On the one hand, cultural scenarios provide guidance for behaviour within specific contexts. On the other hand, these very same cultural scenarios 'are rarely entirely predictive of actual behaviour' because they are '...too abstractly generic to be consistently applicable in all circumstances' (Simon and Gagnon 1986:98, 99). All social interaction is conditioned by a degree of improvisation or tinkering with the script. 'Even in the most tradition-bound of collectives, not all requirements of a role can be applied uniformly' Simon and Gagnon 1986:99).

According to Irvine (2003:489), 'the metaphor of the script explains how it is that sexual behaviour is transformed into sexual conduct'. Gagnon and Simon (1973:153) distinguish between the two concepts¹²; 'conduct is behaviour as prescribed or evaluated by the group. It is not simply external observable behaviour, but behaviour that expresses a norm or evaluation.' The group or collective is important to working with sexual scripts, and has been so right from initial development of the concept when the two scholars sought to move away from studying sexuality through the prism of drives and biological determinism. Sexual scripts by conceptualisation necessarily concern themselves with the social context, and the individuals in the sexual relationship – both in terms of what happens between them as they interact, and also what goes on inside each of them¹³.

Frith and Kitzinger (2001) criticise sexual script theory's claims to be a form of social constructionism arguing that 'it incorporates individualistic and cognitive assumptions that ignore the social context in which self-report data are produced.' They further explain: 'we show how script theory, as used in sexuality research, is rooted in the individualistic cognitive assumptions typical of mainstream

¹² They built their initial departure around Burgess' (1949) distinction between sexual conduct and sexual behaviour (see Gagnon and Simon 1973).

¹³ 'According to Simon and Gagnon (2003:495), 'The scripting question, beyond concerning itself with the meaning of the sexual within social life (the interpersonal and the cultural), must necessarily concern itself with the uses and gratifications the sexual provides specific individual actors (the intrapsychic). Both levels of concern remain critically important; both contain the present and future of sexual behaviour. However, it would be a profound misconception to assume that the current "truth(s)" of one fully or even substantially contains the "truth(s)" of the other.'

psychology (and actively rejected by many social constructionists), and how it ignores the immediate social context in which scripted accounts are produced by participants' (2001:210-211)¹⁴.

Some critics even question the ability of script theory to go beyond the cognitive level to the social one. According to Frith and Kitzinger (2001:212) 'What feminist and other sexuality researchers who use 'script theory' do seem to have in common, however, is that they understand scripts as things that reside inside people's heads (as cognitions), which are merely emptied out in self-reported data (in questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, etc). Thus, despite the fact that script theory is claimed to offer a fundamentally social (indeed, social constructionist) account of sexuality, it is in fact – even in the *most* social version of the theory, as used in sexuality research – fundamentally *cognitive* [emphasis in original]'.

I find this argument flawed. If one considers the three interconnected levels of sexual scripts to include the cultural scenarios, interpersonal and intrapsychic levels, then sexual scripts do not only 'reside inside people's head' but are also actively renegotiated within the interpersonal interactions where the abstract social-cultural scripts become concretised, and the concrete level reshapes the intrapsychic realm of fantasies, desires, feelings, meanings, etc. Sexual scripts reside at three levels – the social, interpersonal and within individuals. What is important is the meaning they signify to the actors. This echoes Geertz' (1973) essay on the complexity of locating of culture, illustrated by questioning where a Beethoven quartet lies¹⁵. He explains that,

'Culture, this acted document, thus is public, like a burlesqued wink or a mock sheep raid. Though ideational, it does not exist in someone's head; though unphysical, it is not an occult entity. The interminable, because unterminable, debate within anthropology as to whether culture is

¹⁴ 'Our central argument is that, contrary to the claims of many feminist psychologists, script theory, as employed in most work on sexuality, is *not* a social constructionist approach – by which we mean that it relies heavily on mentalistic or cognitive constructs, and that it is fundamentally *individualistic* and *a-social*. For social constructionism, by contrast, the chief locus of understanding is in social relationships' (Frith and Kitzinger 2001:213).

¹⁵ Geertz (1973:12-13) discusses: 'If, leaving our winks and sheep behind for the moment, we take, say, a Beethoven quartet as an, admittedly rather special but, for these purposes, nicely illustrative, sample of culture, no one would, I think, identify it with its score, with the skills and knowledge needed to play it, with the understanding of it possessed by its performers or auditors, nor, to take care, *en passant*, of the reductionists and reifiers, with a particular performance of it or with some mysterious entity transcending material existence... But that a Beethoven quartet is a temporally developed tonal structure, a coherent sequence of modelled sound – in a word, music – and not anybody's knowledge of or belief about anything, including how to play it, is a proposition to which most people are, upon reflection, likely to assent.'

"subjective" or "objective," together with the mutual exchange of intellectual insults ("idealist!"- "materialistic!"; "mentalist!"- "behaviourist!"; "impressionist!"- "positivist!") which accompanies it, is wholly misconceived. Once human behaviour is seen as (most of the time; there are true twitches) symbolic action – action which, like phonation in speech, pigment in painting, line in writing, or sonance in music, signifies – the question as to whether culture is patterned conduct or a frame of mind, or even the two somehow mixed together, loses sense. The thing to ask about a burlesqued wink or a mock sheep raid is not what their ontological status is. It is the same as that of rocks on the one hand and dreams on the other – they are things of this world. The thing to ask is what their import is: what it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that in their occurrence and through their agency is getting said.' (Geertz 1973:10)

Furthermore, the supposition that self-reported data are sufficient sources about sexuality and sexual behaviour has been challenged. Thus it was important that I triangulated methods beyond self-reports: including participant observation, the accounts of others and literature review. And because I approached sexuality from a social constructionist perspective, focussing on normative values as well as individual beliefs and practices, most of my data touched the levels of the social-cultural and interpersonal scripts.

The three levels were embedded in different forms of my data. Cultural scenarios¹⁶ emerged in the data from focus group discussions, literature review, key informant interviews, and participant observation about commonly held values and norms pertinent in study communities. Interpersonal scripts were comparably easier to observe while I went about my thing of doing ethnography, sometimes even participating for example as a mediator. Because I lived for long with these study participants, and went up to the point of becoming an accepted 'family member' in some of the compounds, I witnessed a lot of the sexual processes and relationships between different youths – of course to varying depths depending on the level of proximity, trust and rapport. After establishing rapport either in the capacity of researcher or friend, it was easier for self-reported data to be cross-checked, verified and then either confirmed or

¹⁶ Because culture is not exactly seen, does not exist out there in tangible forms, but is rather implied, derived, appreciated, articulated, expressed, transferred and defined through the actions, perspectives, thoughts and words of individuals in interaction with each other, the interpersonal script level is crucial to arriving at the sexual scenario level.

contested. Self-reported data about sexuality are affected by social desirability. However with the investment of time, repeat interaction including outside the boundaries of research frameworks, and cultivation of trust, then the anthropologist is able to break barriers created by initial social distance. Often I was invited by participants to confirm the validity of their narratives from relatives, close friends, or indeed the sexual partner(s). In the main, I only started to uncover the depths of the intrapsychic scripts, because my disciplinary training and research experience availed me with strengths of studying meanings within interpersonal and broader social cultural contexts, as opposed to analysing mental processes. Nevertheless, since the cultural scenarios shape the intrapsychic scripts, and the interpersonal scripts are often enactments of the internal desires and fantasies, it was possible to obtain some information about this level. Furthermore, I asked individuals direct questions about their individual sexual preferences and thus obtained as much as this method of data collection could elicit.

2.3.2 Interpersonal scripts

The level of interpersonal scripts comprises the actualised performance of sexual scripts held at the other two levels. According to Irvine (2003:489), 'Interpersonal scripts are patterns of interaction that allow us to function in sexual situations. They are usually fashioned from some combination of cultural and intrapsychic scripts, as well as from the imagined expectations of the partners.'

Agency and the active role of individual social actors are apparent at the level of interpersonal scripts. Rather than being conceptualised as passive actors designed to follow the scripts to the letter, individuals can become co-writers of the script by determining which aspects to follow as prescribed, which to adjust to better their specific needs, and which to reject entirely. According to Simon and Gagnon (1986:99) the level of interpersonal scripts 'transforms the social actor from being exclusively an actor trained in his or her role(s) and adds to his/ her burdens the task of being a partial scriptwriter or adaptor as he/ she becomes involved in shaping the materials of relevant cultural scenarios into scripts for context-specific behaviour'¹⁷. This level of sexual scripts is the site of agency, negotiation, choice, compromise, suggestion to try out or exclude this or that. According to Jones and Hostler (2001:124), 'interpersonal

¹⁷ Simon and Gagnon (2003:494) further explain that 'the enlarged role of the actor as an active subject' was developed in response to Burke's assertion of the 'metaphoric nature of all desire'. Change, flux and dynamism are acknowledged: '...variability of the characteristics of the human at even the most fundamental levels...'

scripting involves the modification of a generic script to fit a current circumstance in the light of personal history of the actor observing significant others (e.g. family, friends) in interaction.'¹⁸ The possibility of failure of congruence between the abstract scenario and the concrete interactional situation must be solved at the level of interpersonal scripting (Simon and Gagnon 1986:99).

Furthermore at this level, the actors negotiate with self about what is desired, fantasised about, constructed as sexual in relation to what is permissible within the parameters of how one self-defines. For example Jones and Hostler (2001:120) illustrate the necessary connectedness of sexual scripting to the broader processes of self-definition and identity. Because of the possibilities of improvisation at this level, interpersonal scripts 'represent the mechanism through which appropriate identities are made congruent with desired expectations' (Simon and Gagnon 1986). Within the interpersonal interaction, individual actors can negotiate to achieve their personal desires, fantasies and eroticism conjured up at the intrapsychic level¹⁹, and also socially constructed as belonging to the sexual terrain. Thus at the interpersonal level of interaction, actors are involved in multiple negotiations:

- 1) either fulfilling, compromising or adjusting their intrapsychic scripts,
- 2) negotiating with other actor(s) what actually comprises their concrete sexual experience,
- 3) selectively confirming, adjusting or contesting available cultural scenarios and their wider prescriptions and proscriptions of socially approved behaviour. What happens at the interpersonal script level reveals which cultural scenario(s) one adheres to, and generally speaks to their youth subculture.

Also, it is important to highlight that the partner's imagined, expressed, as well as revealed reception of one's own script, affects the eventual interpersonal script, and the potential for revision²⁰.

¹⁸ According to Reed and Weinberg (1984), in events of uncertainty about appropriate behaviour, individual actors refer to what they know about the behaviour of other people who are close to them either physically or socially, and then match or adapt their personal sexual scripts in interaction with the dominant cultural script.

¹⁹ In their discussion of the linkages between the interpersonal script and the intrapsychic script levels, Simon and Gagnon (1986:99 note3) liken this to the constant double activities in the Bakhtinian model in which 'every individual engages in two perpendicular activities. He forms lateral (horizontal) relationships with other individuals in specific speech acts, and he simultaneously forms internal (vertical) relationships between the outer world and his own psyche.'

²⁰ Jones and Hostler (2001:124) further clarify, 'Often, the actor's experience and construction of the script depend upon both what his or her partner appears to be doing and experiencing. The sexual script is derived and maintained by a complex combination of cultural scenarios, perceptions of the partner's actual experience, and the requirements or expectations placed upon the other to sustain sexual excitement... Scripting directs the "actor" to take on a role that acquires meaning only in relationship and in interaction with other roles. Individually and outside of contextual cues,

The notion of the ability of actors to negotiate and act out their sexual scripts in specific ways, reveals that the extent to which individuals or even sexual partners conform in their sexual conduct with convention, is fluid and very dependent on their need for social approval, or fear of punishment. It is also greatly affected by the sexual partner's level of conservatism or radicalism towards social norms²¹. The proneness to conformity is determined by the relationship between the social actors' commitment to socially desirable goals, and the availability of legitimate means for obtaining such achievements (for details see Simon and Gagnon 1976, 2003:493).

There is a subtle tension between prescriptive sexual practice²² versus the agency of individuals in sexual encounters to choose their behaviour. While cultural scenarios set the broad picture, interpersonal scripts allow individuals to negotiate and choose the final concrete practices and the way they are experience.

When a given script is enacted or engaged, a somewhat predictable behavioural outcome will follow, made unique by the person's interpersonal and intrapsychic scripts as well as unique situational variables. Humans are continually recreating, perfecting, and reinterpreting sexual scripts in a fluid and dynamic process (Jones and Hostler 2001:124).

Gagnon (1977) captures this tension between predictability and improvisation well:

'I do not view how people become sexual as a process of unfolding, or maturing, or going through a sequence of stages. Our bodies do get larger in a somewhat orderly sequence, but the psychological meanings given to those changes are not fixed or eternal; each culture has different patterns of giving meaning to the processes of human development. We assemble our sexuality,

roles are meaningless. The actor's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour are contingent upon the response of others, including their thoughts, feelings, behaviour, inhibitions, and meaning or purpose in the situation.'

²¹ One of the departures of Gagnon and Simon was against the functionalist approach to sexuality which conceptualised it as serving specific fixed social functions, and they criticised the ultimate goal of an idealised nuclear family, specific gender roles, and fixed patterns of gender division of labour as being 'claustrophobic conformity'. They sought for a framework that allowed for diversity and transformation in relation to changing social cultural environments.

²² For example Jones and Hostler (2001:123) state that 'scripts can generate behaviours that function as self-fulfilling prophecies in support of the script itself (thus at times promoting dysfunctional consistency) and make it difficult for the person to act in ways outside of (inconsistent with) the script...' Furthermore Alksnis et al. (1996) also suggest that we develop scripts for stereotyped sequences of routine events and for social interactions.

picking and choosing and rejecting the ideas, beliefs, feelings, and practices offered to us in our own society. Although we are not merely passive reflections of our culture, we cannot totally transcend it. Life is a constant tension between scripts and improvisation, between ritual and innovation.'

Rather than conceptualise sexual scripts as given or set in stone, Gagnon (1977:6) highlights that 'scripts do change, as new elements are added and old elements are reworked, but very few people have the desire, energy, or persistence to create highly innovative or novel scripts – and even fewer people can convert a private idiosyncrasy into a socially or culturally important event; that is create a really new script that becomes a part of the social code (Gagnon 1977:6).' Furthermore, there is continuity of script development throughout the life span (Gagnon et al. 1982). Within specific sexual relationships, the interpersonal scripts evolve as the relationship develops in intensity and level of commitment (Jones and Hostler 2001:125).

2.3.3 Intrapsychic scripts

This level of sexual scripts involves each individual's own mental script for being sexual. According to Irvine (2003:489), 'Intrapsychic scripts take form in the internal world of desires, fantasies and wishes. ...although intrapsychic scripts are experienced as originating in a core recess of the self, they are not biological drives, and are not the opposite of cultural scenarios, but are, in fact, shaped by culture'. Jones and Hostler (2001:124) explain that 'intrapsychic scripts emerge as the developing person attributes unique personal meanings to the experiences to which he or she has been exposed.'

Simon and Gagnon (1986:100) 'intrapsychic scripting thus becomes an historical necessity as a private world of wishes and desires that are experienced as originating in the deepest recesses of the self and must be bound to social life: the linking of individual desires to social meanings'. Internal rehearsal of individuals' sexualities occurs at this level long before they begin engaging in sexual activity

2.4 Appropriating sexual scripts as a heuristic device

Although critics such as Frith and Kitzinger (2001:211) above question the ability of using sexual scripts to analyse the social aspects of sexuality, I found the approach as propounded by Gagnon and Simon useful in examining the variety of emic meanings of youth sexualities at the levels of the communities I studied, youth sub-cultures, within sexual relationships and at the individual level.

I needed a tool that allowed interrogation of diverse levels of meaning of the sexual. Unlike the concept of discourse which presupposes power structures, sexual scripts allowed the analysis to explore both the dominant and marginalised constructions of youth sexualities. Because my data were more than talk, but also included observations, and experience of local life that I participated in, the sexual script perspective facilitated interrogation of meaning within these different data sets. Basically, I used sexual scripts as a heuristic device to present my analysis of youth sexualities.

As explained above, I also appropriated sexual scripts as a tool of analysis for organising my higher level generalisation of the super codes, code families and relationships. Although in their critical paper about script formulation²³ the focus is on how in talking about sexuality study participants construct its scripted-ness, Frith and Kitzinger (2001:217) also highlight that sexual scripts can be analytical tools: 'In taking this approach, we are making a distinction between sexual scripts as an analyst resource (an analytical category used by social scientists to make sense of behaviour) and sexual scripts as a participant resource (i.e. as used by research participants to achieve certain interactional goals) (see Frith and Kitzinger 1997, 1998).'

When the volume of my different data sets had become very large, and the coding was reaching points of saturation for most of the important super codes, I found great overlap between my basic code structure and the exploratory questions specified by Simon and Gagnon i.e., who has sex with who?, what is it they do that is sexual?, where do they have sex?, when do they have sex? How do they perform sexual

²³ They contrast sexual script theory with an alternative theoretical perspective on self-reported data, based on Edward's (1995, 1997) concept of script formulations. They distinguish between the script as existent in reported data versus the script as a creation within the process of reporting about sexual behaviour. Rather than truthfully regurgitate what was experienced, study participants recreate sexuality as though it were scripted. They 'show how the "scripted" quality of sexual interaction is actively produced as part of speaker's orientation to issues of accountability' explaining '... five devices used to construct sexual encounters as scripted: i) references to predictable stages, ii) references to common knowledge, iii) the production of consensus through seamless turn-taking and collaborative talk, iv) the use of hypothetical and general instances, v) active voicing' (Frith and Kitzinger 2001:209).

things? And why? Gagnon (1977) develops a matrix combining the five Ws; which I based on to ask for example who has what sex with who and why do they do it? These analytical questions of the data, further expanded the emerging sexual scripts – what they prescribed and proscribed against.

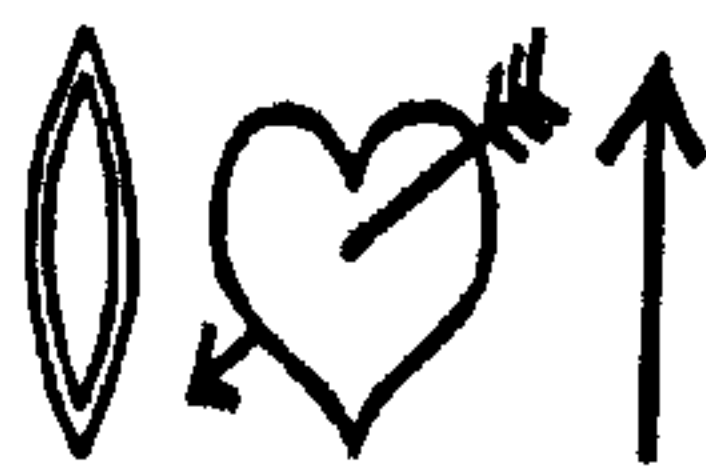
Furthermore, the critical questions I formulated as command syntaxes for the queries in Atlas.ti, that I used to explore and analyse relationships within the hermeneutic unit I built from the different data sets, often rhymed Gagnon and Simon's (1973) 'expandable portfolio of whys' including why how?, why when?, why with whom?, and more importantly, who's why?' This moved the data analysis to another level of interrogation and allowed me to trace connections between broader themes within specific sub-cultures which eventually led to the main thematic codes of analysis that I have presented as the predominant sexual scripts within the study context (see chapter ten).

The sexual script approach fit in well with the grounded theory I was developing. It was also compatible with my social constructionist epistemological positioning (see also Hyde and Oliver 2000:64). Employing sexual scripts in my analysis allowed me to achieve of my goal of locating the meanings of sexualities in the Gambian study context within broader social cultural networks of meaning. According to Thomson and Scott (1990:5-6) sexual script theory 'acknowledges the social nature of sexuality and the labelling process through which we construct what we understand sex to be'.

In addition, as I highlighted in the eclectic body of theoretical perspectives that inform my scholarship of sexualities, working with sexual scripts fit well with the critical paradigm of interpretive symbolic interactionism because it allowed me to explore the changing meanings attributed to diverse emic symbols of the sexual terrain among different youth sub-cultures I studied. Thus I was able to explore the flux, fluidity, contrast, contradictory and continuously negotiated meanings of sexualities among youths dependent on the setting of interaction or discussion. The ability to adopt sexual scripts to these Gambian data confirms that 'the scripting perspective has remained remarkably robust and stable as an explanatory framework for sexual conduct which is responsive to a changing historical and cultural environment' (Simon and Gagnon 2003:491).

For long, I looked at the study communities to define for me the various ways in which youth sexualities held meaning for them at whatever level. As illustrated in the ethnographic cycle of questions that developed over time (see appendix 12), I collected these data, by allowing the findings in the field to

lead me down unanticipated avenues of inquiry. After I had amassed a lot of data, and was grappling with how to arrange them, I chose to use the scripting metaphor/ perspective/ approach/ explanatory framework to organise and present my findings. This is an ethnography principally premised on the grounded theory and appropriating sexual scripts as a heuristic device to analyse emic meanings of youth sexualities in The Gambia.



Chapter 3: Youths, sexuality and theory

This chapter introduces the research themes namely youths, sexuality and theory.

In the first section I review literature about youths in Africa and explore the local meanings of 'youth' as a concept appropriated in my study area. I examine youth policy processes in The Gambia. I interrogate literature and empirical data.

'Sexuality' is an ambivalent label. Through history, it has been studied from diverse perspectives (John and Nair 1998, Rich 1986). In the second section I review shifting paradigms in human sexuality research, and describe the approach of anthropology to the study of human sexuality. I reflect on Caldwell's thesis of an African sexuality.

In the third section I discuss the important role of anthropology to academic theorisation, particularly regarding context-specific concepts. I also problematise the prevalent practice of Africanist scholars aping Western thought patterns, processes, and systems of knowledge production. I end with the need for understanding and incorporating lay theories if sexuality studies are to have local impact and relevance.

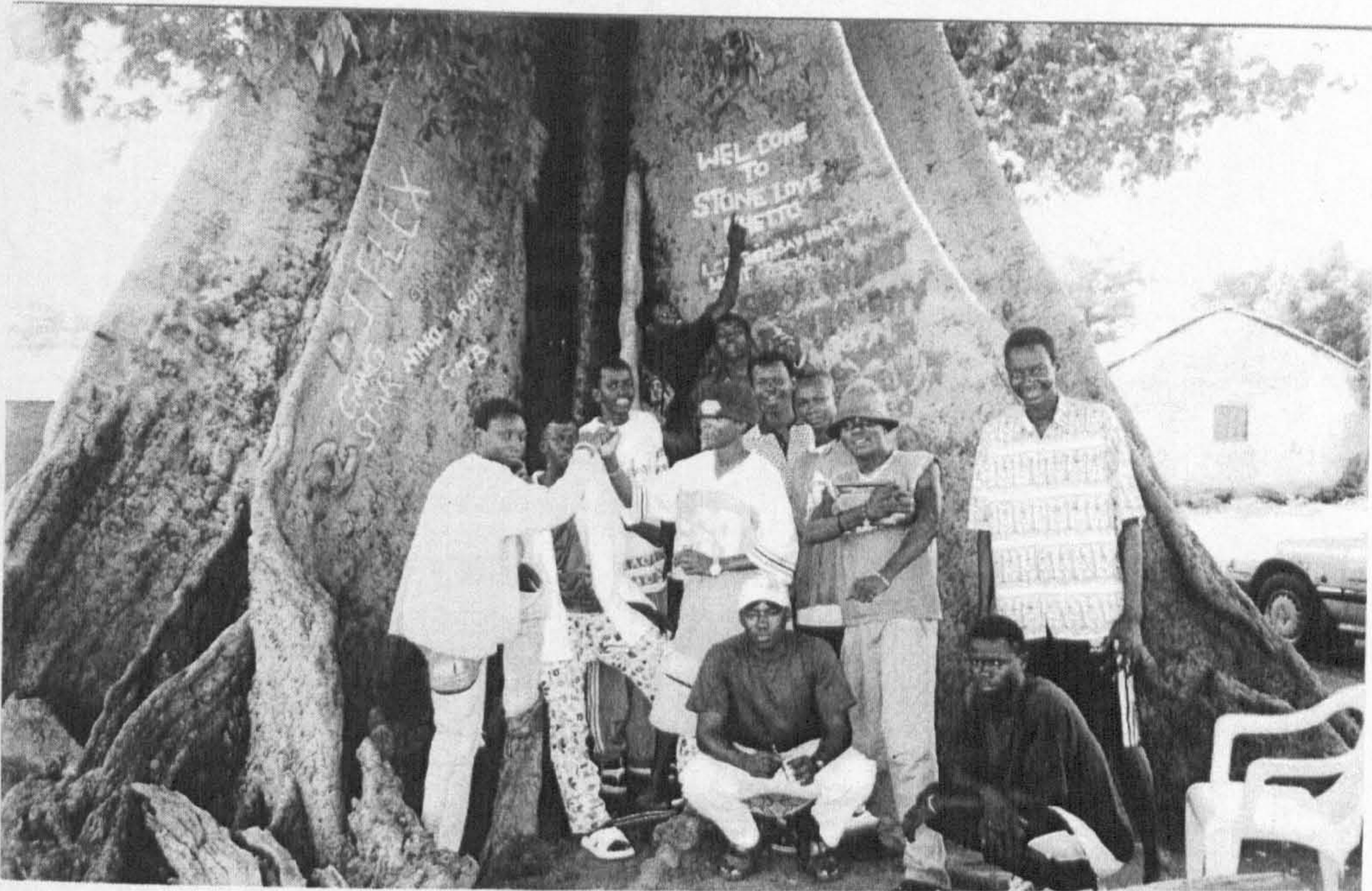
3.1 Youth

'Youth is a state of mind!'

The dichotomy drawn between children and adults has left limited space for those who sit inconveniently at the boundary... Youth is less closely related to physical distinctiveness than childhood, and is often described as a Western concept. Ansell (2005:13)

Youth is '...not so much circumscribed by biological age as by status and behaviour: the group includes all those who do not (yet) have the material means and the recognition to establish themselves as providers for others.' Nolte (2004)

Figure 3.1 'Stone Love Ghetto' youths in Farafenni



In the local languages, there was a clear distinction between children and adults (see *figure 3.2*). However, I had to probe for words for infancy or babyhood as a separate phase of childhood because there was a tendency to use the expression for children to cover all these phases. Digging deeper for everyday references to youths, revealed that they were referred to with words that either located them among 'big children' or 'young adults' usually taking the gendered noun and attaching an age-descriptor. Thus 'young man', or 'big boy'. I asked about local words for 'teenager' or 'adolescent' but generally got lengthy expressions spelling out for example 'boys and girls aged between eleven and twelve'. Unlike English which follows a base ten numeric system, Wollof and Fula are base five languages. So they have a different number clustering system. While teenage makes perfect sense in English, it is not as straightforward in a base-five count; - the period from two-fives-and-three, to three-fives-and-four. It was also interesting that one word was used in the local languages to refer to man, male, masculine, and another to woman, female, feminine.

Figure 3.2 Local words for stages of the life-course

Fula ¹	Wollof ²	Mandinka	English
Kechel	Liir	Deenano	Baby
Kechel gorko	Liir bu gor	Deenano kewo	Baby boy
Kechel debo	Liir bu jigen	Deenano muso	Baby girl
Sukabebe/ suka	Hale	Dingdingo	Child
Chukalele gorel	Hale bu gor	Dingdingo kewo	Boy child
Chukalele debo	Hale bu jigen	Dingdingo muso	Girl child
Chukalele gorko	Janha	Sunkuto	Girl
Chukalele debo	Wahambane	Kambano	Boy
Sagata		Foni kewo	Young man
Chemedo ³		Foro muso	Young woman
Gorko	Gor	Kewo	Man
Debo	Jigen	Muso	Woman
Maudo gorko	Maget bu jigen	Keba	Old man
Maudo debo	Maget bu gor	Musukeba	Old woman
Maudo	Mag		Adult
	Khelifa		Elderly man - respect

Many times I got insight into local appreciations of age and the lifecycle beyond the numeric count of years. One example that greatly irked me was how I was repeatedly asked to leave sessions when adult women counselled brides in the Fula homestead of my first adoptive father, yet teenage mothers were allowed to stay and participate. I was allowed to attend everything that children were allowed to attend. Then some elderly woman or another would announce, ‘May the children now leave!’ And no matter how I reasoned with them, as long as I was without child, I was never allowed to sit in on these sex education sessions. Even though I was thirty, I was always told, ‘You are a child, because you have no child of your own.’ Thus, it is important to appreciate the problematic nature of seemingly universal concepts such as youth, and to be aware of not unconsciously slipping into Western notions of youth which may not necessarily translate into local ones.

¹ This is distinctly Butabulung Fula that is spoken in Dibba Kunda Fula, where I am an adopted daughter.

² This is specifically Fanafana Wollof spoken in the provinces around Farafenni. It differs in dialect to for example SalemSalem Wollof, Banjul Wollof, or Dakaris one.

³ *Chemedo* can also refer to one’s girlfriend: *Oko chemedam* – This is my girlfriend.

3.1.1 Youths in scholarly discourse

Youths in Sub-Saharan Africa have received considerable attention; with studies focussing on their controversial roles in politics, conflicts and rebellious movements (Abbink and van Kessel 2005, Brennan 2006, Honwana 2006), positive or negative contributions to socio-economic development (Nafukho 1998, Obi 2006, Brown 1992), and impacts of natural disasters including epidemics, famine, wars, etc. Development-oriented literature contains success stories of youths making positive contributions in diverse fields. Trudell et al. (2002) highlight youths as positive energy, a sharp contrast with the common perception of youths as lumpen, for example Kagwanja (2006, 2003) on the Mungiki, Meagher (2007) on the Bakassi Boys vigilante group, and Tadele (2006) on Ethiopia's street-children. Youths are at the forefront of innovative African developments. This section systematically reviews literature about youths in Africa.

3.1.1.1 The elasticity of youth

An anthropology of adolescence, then, is not the same as an anthropology of youth
(Bucholtz 2002:544).

While some scholars assert that adolescence is a creation of the post war period and modernity (e.g. Furstenberg 2000), others (e.g. Schlegel 1995) challenge this assumption by highlighting the existence of such categories in non-Western societies (Bucholtz 2002:528); specifically 'pre-industrial African societies' (Glaser 1998b:722). I was particularly interested in the complex fluid period between childhood and adulthood specifically as it related to sexualisation processes within the Gambian context. Rather than study adolescence which is more definite in scope⁴, and focused on the biological life cycle transition from childhood to adulthood⁵

⁴ While Bucholtz (2002:526) agrees with this assertion, she also highlights that this category is context-specific: 'Related categories like adolescent, teenager, or young adult provide a greater degree of specificity concerning age, but they also vary in their application across contexts'.

⁵ According to Furstenberg (2000:897), 'ever since Mead (1928) published her famous study, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, scholars from different disciplines have disagreed over the extent to which adolescence – as a life stage or as a developmental period – is biologically programmed.' However she cautions against ignoring the role that biology plays in determining some of the changes during this phase of life: 'Even so, ignorance of biological sciences makes many social scientists vulnerable to simple-minded and reductionist

(see Durham 2000:116), I categorically chose the more complex social-cultural group of youth. I was interested in exploring transitions beyond the biological developments of the body that were encompassed within puberty, and adolescence, or indeed those bound within the chronological space of teenage. Thus I considered youth - a rather ambiguous period.

Descriptions within the literature that capture the elasticity of youth include the 'prolonged adolescence thesis' (Blatterer 2005:36), 'prolongation of adulthood' (Furstenberg 2000:897), 'extension of adolescence beyond the teen years' (Furstenberg 2000:896), 'lengthened period in which the transition to adulthood occurs'⁶ (Furstenberg 2000:896), 'arrested adulthood', being 'trapped in perpetual youthhood' (Côté 2000:97-101), and 'protraction of youth' (Furlong 2000:132). Furstenberg (2000:897) elaborates: 'a social class of people who were neither children nor adults. As such, these people enjoyed a lengthy period of semiautonomy.' Such individuals are described using crossbreed categories such as 'adultescents', 'adultoscents', 'kidults', or 'rejuveniles' (Blatterer 2005:37), who characteristically stay longer in parental homes, shift from job to job and eschew marriage or family, preferring experimental living and risk-taking with scant regard for stability. Furstenberg (2000:899) also refers to this as 'later "nest leaving"'. Several reasons are given for this phenomenon including transformations in society in the post-war period which comprised widespread unemployment, late entry into the workforce, extension of formal education, decline of the family-based farm, delayed age of marriage (Neyzi 2001, Furstenberg 2000, Frederiksen 2000, Ivaska 2005, Blatterer 2005). Specific to sub-Saharan Africa, the systemic disruptions caused by structural adjustment programmes further compounded the stretchability of youth because the state failed to provide necessary social services including health, education, employment opportunities, housing, etc (Jua 2003, Klopp and Orina 2002,

explanations (Hernstein and Murray 1994, Popenoe 1996)'. She gives the example of Udry (1994) whose work shows that 'the timing of sexual behaviour is targeted by biological changes, although the context and content of sexual expression is surely socially negotiated' (2000:898).

⁶ Furstenberg (2000:898) further explains that 'at the century's end, the transition to adulthood extended into the third decade of life and is not completed by a substantial fraction of young adults until their 30s (as was the case at the beginning of the century'.

Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 20006, Jeng 2000, Badsha 2002, Musokotwane 1989, Osei-Hwedie and Ndulo 1989). Commercialisation of education led to increased school-drop-outs, who were unable to access employment because of high unemployment levels consequent to government restrictions of its projects (Ya'u 2000). Universal Primary Education programmes mass-produced educated youths who could not be absorbed by the few post-primary institutions (Ojo 1980). Many youths who completed school failed to get into formal employment as graduates (Cruise O'Brien 1996:65, Villalon 1994, Albert 1995, Bathily, Diouf and Mbodj 1995, Glaser 1998a, b, Frederiksen 2000, Bundy 1987, Jua 2003, Rea 1998, Csapo 1983, Konings 2002, Burke 2000, Perullo 2005, Naidoo 1991). Deficit national balance of payments, economic crises, high inflation, devaluation, etc all made the cost of living too high to afford commitments facilitating autonomy and opening doors to adulthood. Disillusionment and despondency yielded either victims, development of various coping mechanisms (Ebin 1993, Durham 2000), or resistance including student strikes (Ivaska 2005, Bundy 1987, Klopp and Orina 2002, Rashid 1997, Konings 2002, Smith 1997, Burke 2000, Cruise O'Brien 1996), politicking (Diouf 1996, Cruise O'Brien 1996, Burgess 1999, 2003, Summers 2005, Toungara 1995, Glaser 1998a, Naidoo 1991), crime in gangs or vigilante groups (Smith 2004, La Hausse 1990, Dissel 1997, Glaser 1998a, b, 1992, Mokwena 1992, Mooney 1998), militarism, civil rebellion or guerrilla warfare (Richards 1996, Peters and Richards 1998, Argenti 1998, Utas 2005, Seekings 1993, Honwana 2006, Peters 2004, Badsha 2002, Ahluwalia et al. 2007), or alternative lifestyles (Villalon 1995, Adisa 1997, PEA 1989, Tadele 2000, Nyanzi et al. 2005)⁷. While many explanations in the literature are social structural or cultural, in some cases they include youth agency: 'individuals actively reject growing up' (Blatterer 2005:37).

⁷ See Scott (1990:136-169) for a discussion of diverse forms of resistance ranging from humour, anger to genuine positions of resistance. Glaser (1998b) highlights the relative lack of analyses of girls in youth subcultures of resistance including girl gangs. According to Naidoo (1991:163) 'Gender issues were also significant in determining the nature of youth resistance. Young women, historically less involved in overt oppositional activities, asserted themselves increasingly in an urban environment in which traditional values were being eroded. However, the gender breakdown of youth organisations showed a disproportionate number of men, despite the fact that some of the most vital leaders were women.'

Youth is now a relatively longer period, and a status or social identity which individuals occupy for a significant time of their lives. Frederiksen (2000:213) differentiates between a 'prolonged phase of youth' for men in many African societies, and the expectation for women to marry and bear children soon after puberty and initiation (see also Glaser 1998b:722). In this study, I concentrated on youth as a period in its own right (Wulff 1995, Bucholtz 2002), rather than dwell on its transitional attribute – 'a denial of self perception and ideas of the youth as a social category' (Momoh 2000:181).

3.1.1.2 The ambivalence of youth

But if adolescence as the central concept for anthropological research on young people is at once too broad (because universalized) and too narrow (because psychologized), then youth culture is too burdened by its historical ties to particular theoretical positions (Bucholtz 2002:526).

Youth is not always a homogenous, discrete or bounded category. Generation lacks the demographic precision of gender, and, to a lesser extent, ethnicity. Nor do generations appear to always share the same material interests. Youthful status varies widely according to time and place; it tends to emerge out of local idioms and languages, and is lost or gained through the aging process and a variety of personal decisions and life events. Often invisible to censuses and maps, youth consists of a constantly shifting population moving in and out of locally determined notions of youthfulness (Burgess 2005).

There is no absolute definition for 'youth' as a category of scholarship⁸ (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995, Abdullah and Bangura 1997, Cruise O'Brien 1996, Durham 2000, Bucholtz 2002,

⁸ Burgess (2005: viii) elaborates this point: 'It is more difficult, however, to work toward a set of common scholarly understandings about youth and generation that are neither banal nor easily assailable. How can youth be defined? How is the category constructed? Is youth a primary or secondary identity? Are young people to be known as "youth," or by some other name? What is the relationship of youth not only with

Abbink and van Kessel 2005, Christiansen, Utas and Vigh 2006). Meaning is diverse⁹ and even changes within specific contexts (Ivaska 2005, Jua 2003, Summers 2005, Diouf 2003, Perullo 2005, Rea 1998, Stambach 2000, Frederiksen 2000, Glaser 1998a, Naidoo 1991). According to Burgess (2005:viii) ‘...nor is the label extremely exclusive, with definitions of “youth” shifting from one locality to the next’¹⁰. Diverse contexts situate youths differently, and thereby proffer varying characteristics, roles, rights, responsibilities and expectations on them – often shaped in line with other systemic operators of differentiation such as gender, class, location, and race (Christiansen et al. 2007). ‘Generational definitions are ultimately inseparable from gender socialisation’ (Glaser 1998b:722). Youth is sometimes conceptualised based on social circumstances rather than chronological age (Bucholtz 2002:526, James 1995:45, Wulff 1995:6, Ly 1981:52, Frederiksen 2000, Bundy 1987, Ignatowski 2004:428). Burke (2000:207) asserts that ‘often youth are defined by what they are not (unmarried, childless, without independent resources)...’ Furthermore, according to Stambach (2000:171) ‘the concept of youth is invoked in revivals to draw attention to the structuring of social differences.’ Youth is also often given meaning in relation to other social categories of people within the life course, or social political ladder (Aguilar 1998, Vigh 2006, Burgess 2003, Durham 2000). For example, in explaining the changing meanings of youth in relation to elders in East Africa, Burgess (2005:xi) remarks, ‘If gerontocratic discourse affirmed that youth was a liminal stage between childhood and adulthood, and between dependence and autonomy, the category came in the colonial period to exist in a

their elders, but with women, workers, farmers, colonial officials, and the postcolonial state? Do youth share certain interests and distinct characteristics as a stage in the life cycle? Do we simply note the youthfulness of local actors, without investing theoretical energy or ascribing any importance to their age?’

⁹ Naidoo (1991:145) expounds: ‘The youth can be divided into at least five categories: primary, secondary and tertiary (university, college, technikon) students, the unemployed, and workers. Depending on racial divisions, but also on the class composition of particular communities, these categories take qualitatively distinct forms. These qualitative differences are determined by contrasting structural conditions, ranging from the specific nature of the built environment to the various types of control mechanisms deployed by the state.’

¹⁰For example, ‘in a given culture, preadolescent individuals may count as youth, while those in their 30s or 40s may also be included in this category... Moreover, potentially contrasting categories such as child, adult, or elder may shift to incorporate members of the youth category, and conversely’ (Bucholtz 2002:526-527).

very general sense somewhere between village and town, “tradition” and modernity.’ This portrays the situatedness of meanings of youth within a nexus of social relationships with other generation groups, with space, with social transformation, political status, etc. Durham (2000) suggests adopting the label ‘shifter’ to youth. She explains:

‘A shifter is a special kind of deictic or indexical term, a term that works not through absolute referentiality to a fixed context, but one that relates the speaker to a relational, or indexical, context (“here” or “us” are such terms). A shifter has the capability of sometimes going further and bringing into discursive awareness the metalinguistic features of the conversation – that is, it can go beyond immediate relationships being negotiated and draw attention to the structure and its categories that produce or enable the encounter’ (2000:116).¹¹

Several factors contributed to the changing meanings of youth in specific sub-Saharan African contexts. These include diverse communities’ experiences of systemic factors such as colonialism, Christianity and/ or Islam, capitalism, migrant labour, industrialisation, urbanisation, nationalism, independence, civil war, formal education, education in the West, different development packages aimed at achieving modernisation, etc (Ya’u 2000, Jega 2000, Gondola 1999, Badsha 2002, Mager 1998, Peters 2004, Burgess 2003, Zewde 2002, La Hausse 1990, Jankowski 1975, Gable 2000). These transformations upset traditional stability of the assigned meanings, roles and place of youth. They thus shook up the local constructions of the special relationships youth customarily had with adults, elders and even children for example in agrarian, pastoral, fishing or trading communities (Aguilar 1998, Cattell 1997, Moller and Sotshongaye 2002, Frederiksen 2000, Summers 2005). Traditional rites of passage were hijacked, dislocated,

¹¹ Bucholtz (2002:528) explains how this linguistic concept can be applied to youth: ‘A shifter is a word that is tied directly to the context of speaking and hence takes much of its meaning from situated use, such as the deictics *I*, *here*, and *now*. Likewise, the referential function of *youth* cannot be determined in advance of its use in a particular cultural context, and its use indexes the nature of the context in which it is invoked. As a shifter, then, youth is a context-renewing and a context-creating sign whereby social relations are both (and often simultaneously) reproduced and contested’.

fragmented, criminalised, associated with pagan rituals, such that many are now eroded, relegated to history, practised underground or revised beyond recognition¹². Along with specific prescribed norms for gender, and class, the normative posture of various generation groups including youth were destabilised (Summers 2005, Mooney 1998, Makoni and Stroeken 2002, Moller and Sotsoshongaye 2002, Makoni 2002, Badsha 2002:8). This fragmented the embedded-ness and mutual responsibilities of youth within kinship ties, clan affiliation and the extended family system (Diouf 2003, Ly 1981:59). Whereas age was once a key principal that determined and influenced social structure (Bernadi 1985), due to post-colonial experiences intended to lead African communities to a transition through modernity, generational hierarchies are no longer simple, straightforward and apolitical.

3.1.1.3 Scholarly conceptualisations of youth

More recently, a third approach – an anthropology of youth – has begun to take shape, sparked by the stimuli of modernity and globalization and the ambivalent engagement of youth in local contexts. This broad and interdisciplinary approach revisits questions first raised in earlier sociological and anthropological frameworks, while introducing new issues that arise under current economic, political, and cultural conditions. The anthropology of youth is characterized by its attention to the agency of people, its concern to document not just highly visible youth cultures but the entirety of youth cultural practice, and its interest in how identities emerge in new cultural formations that creatively combine elements of global capitalism, transnationalism, and local culture. (Bucholtz 2002:525).

¹² In their place are new rites of passage such as confirmation and starting holy communion, the first alcoholic drink, passing the driving test (Furstenberg 2000), formal school graduation, 'reaching Europe consummates their entrance into adulthood' (Gondola 1999:30), 'reaching the West becomes the "final port of call," and "entrance into adulthood" (Jua 2003:23), 'temporary labour migration treated as a form of passage for its youth' (Gable 2000:196).

There is a visible and long-established body of work on the sociology of youth particularly in Britain and North America¹³. Youth were conceptualised within class structures. Western psychology studied adolescence as a liminal phase containing crises arising from the uncertainties of physical and social changes between life stages¹⁴. Thus the 'youth as deviant' thesis (see also Mooney 1998). Criminology and juvenile studies further developed the 'youth as delinquent model' which is the precursor for studies in which 'youth is constructed as a problematic category' (Durham 2000:113). According to Momoh (2000:181) 'in this regard, deviance acquires an intrinsic criminality'. Although the foundational ethnographies by Mead (1928) and Malinowski (1929) emphasised the centrality of adolescents in early anthropological inquiry, Bucholtz (2002:525) criticises such research because it 'usually approached adolescence from the perspective of adulthood, downplaying youth-centred interaction and cultural production in favour of an emphasis on the transition to adulthood. Thus anthropology concerned itself not primarily with youth as a cultural category, but with adolescence as a biological and psychological stage of human development.' The focus was on 'youth as transient to adult'. According to Durham (2000:114), 'while anthropologists have not neglected youth in ethnographies of Africa, youth have too often featured in a supporting role. Youth have rarely been studied as the central point from which to examine these conjectures... youth have certainly not been absent from the anthropology of Africa, but attention to them has been sporadic and too often secondary.' The focus of early ethnographies relating to youth basically revolved around

¹³ According to Bucholtz (2002:526) each of these countries is associated with a particular sociological approach to the study of youths: 'The American tradition examines the concept of deviance and its social consequences in young people's cultural practice, and the British tradition examines highly visible forms of working-class youth identities using Marxist theories of culture and poststructuralist semiotic analysis. The latter approach – which provided the foundation for the field of cultural studies – has had the most profound influence on how youth cultures have been studied.'

¹⁴ In psychology this phase of life is universalised, and thus comparable between diverse social cultural contexts. It draws upon the biological changes that come with human development. Young people are conceptualised as incomplete and still in the process of becoming adults. Youth behaviour is explained in relation to their adult communities. As such the construction of meaning magnifies the position of adults rather than the youths (cf. Merten 1999). 'The lived experience of young people is not limited to the uneasy occupation of a developmental way station en route to full-fledged cultural standing. It also involves its own distinctive identities and practices, which are neither rehearsals for the adult "real thing" nor even necessarily oriented to adults at all' (Bucholtz 2002:532).

their place within kinship structures, initiation ceremonies, rites of passage, masquerade societies, age-sets, age-grades, village dormitories, sexual practices, courtship and marital customs, intergenerational relations (Turner 1969, Heald 1995, Richards 1956, La Fontaine 1977, Aguilar 1998, Toungara 1995, Rea 1998, Frederiksen 2000, Ottenberg 1989, Gable 2000, Glaser 1998b, Mager 1998, La Hausse 1990, Ignatowski 2004, Murphy 1980). However changes within anthropology as a discipline, as well as transformations in the boundaries between local and globalising cultures yielded much more anthropological investigations into how youths produce and negotiate cultural forms. Here, the perspective of 'youth as an active agent' is apparent¹⁵. According to Diouf (2003:3), 'the postcolonial project sought to go beyond an ethnology/ anthropology preoccupied with rituals of initiation and socialisation to a sociology focused on the generational and sexual division of labor and on social and economic mobilization.' The agency of youth is central to youth development work which aims at mobilising the diverse abilities of youths, capacity building and harnessing their vast productive resources.

3.1.1.4 Why the increased attention to African youths?

Ignored for long by historians (Burgess 1999:31, 2005:viii)¹⁶, African youths are now 'located at the heart of both analytical apparatuses and political action, they also have become a preoccupation of politicians, social workers, and communities in Africa' (Diouf 2003:2). They are 'entering into political space in highly complex ways' (Durham 2000:113, Ivaska 2005, Jua 2003).

Demographic trends in Africa highlight that young people constitute the majority of the population specifically because of high birth rates, short life expectancies, high mortality rates in adulthood due to civil wars, epidemics including HIV/AIDS, natural disasters, and strenuous

¹⁵ For example Momoh (2000) problematises the criminality associated with the *Area Boys* of Lagos, showing them to be heterogeneous, and also examining how they fashion and recreate cultures of survival amidst multi-faceted economic, political, social, cultural and other breakdowns.

¹⁶ Cf. Durham's (2000:116) description of historians in the West studying youths from as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

conditions of living (Mkandawire 1998, Cruise O'Brien 1996:58, Burgess 2004, Diouf 2003, Peters 2004, Musokwatane 1989, Berry 1985, Durham 2000, Burke 2000, Bundy 1978).

Given their numbers, potential, and civic responsibility youth increasingly become the reference point for solutions¹⁷ to the multidimensional crises of Africa described as 'triple crisis involving the family, the nation, and the state' (Diouf 2003:2). Therefore, these African youths are not only part of the problem¹⁸, but they also represent the very solution. 'The potency and potential of youth' (Durham 2000:113) is harnessed to intervene in society's ills (Stambach 2005:175).

Youths thrive against all odds by refashioning employment opportunities in the informal economy (MacGaffy 1992, Peters 2004:13, Moyer 2005, Thoiub, Diop and Boone 1998) such as small-scale entrepreneurs (Diouf 2003, 1996, Badsha 2002, Frederiksen 2000, Gable 2000, Jua 2003, Ebin 1995, Perullo 2005, Tripp 1997, Rea 1998). Some youths embarked on providing community services where the public systems were severely challenged and essential social services were neglected - such as the Set Setal cleaning in Senegal and The Gambia (Ebin 1993). Some participated in National Youth Services (Ojo 1980), or worked as 'juvenile/ child labourers' (Grier 1994, 2004). Others emigrated within the country, beyond the borders, or even

¹⁷ According to Diouf (2003:2) '...African societies increasingly are looking to young people as instruments of change.' '...put young people at the centre of its plans for economic development and national liberation. Youth was conceived not only as the hope of African nations under construction – the chief actor in African societies' struggle against underdevelopment, poverty, misery, and illiteracy – but also the hope of the world... young people incarnated the future and represented the promised of restored identity, both national and pan-African, as opposed to colonial alienation and postcolonial forms of domination and subordination.' (pp4)

¹⁸ Describing African urban youths, Gondola (1999:30) likens them to 'a body that has become a metaphor for a chaotic social order'. '...youth has become a problem, and society a problem for youth... modern African youth is maladjusted to society both in practical matters and psychologically' (Ly 1981:59). More disparaging descriptions include 'A lost generation' (Cruise O'Brien 1996, Seekings 1996) 'crisis of youth' (Richards 1994), 'the "lumpen youth"' (Naidoo 1991:146), 'a largely marginalised and disenfranchised generation' (Moyer 2005:32), 'images of youth as unruly, destructive, and dangerous forces needing containment' (Durham 2000:1130), 'the "youth time bomb"... youth are on the verge of exploding with anger and disorder' (Perullo 2005:74), 'problems of youth... youth foolishness... youth is a problematic, liminal social category' (Stambach 2000:171). Youths are framed as 'prototypical social problem' (Durham 2000:114).

overseas in search of better economic opportunities (Lambert 2002, Jua 2003, Gable 2000, Nyanzi et al. 2005, Burgess 1999, Gugler 20002).

Tensions between widening globalisation and fragmenting or indeed disappearing local customs are at the heart of the question of how identity and belonging are constantly negotiated in Africa. Appropriating imaginative innovations, youths are central to mediating diverse cultural productions at this interface (e.g. Brown 1991, Gondola 1999, Nyamnjoh and Page 2002, Savishinsky 1994a, b, Mager 1998, Diouf 2003, Moyer 2005, Momoh 2000, Mooney 1998, Hasty 2002, Gable 2000, Jua 2003, Fair 2004, Perullo 2005, Rea 1998, Stambach 2005, Frederiksen 2000, Ballantine 1991). Their role as agents actively making meaning in their lives amidst often challenging environs is apparent (Durham 2000, Bucholtz 2000, Diouf 2003, Glaser 1998b). They create spaces of articulation. They forge links and connect with translocal networks of similar individuals and collectives through the media, technology, religion, pop culture, fashion, the arts, music, language, and lifestyle. As 'postcolonial cultural innovators' (Fair 2004:43), they localise the global and also globalise the local. Thus, 'the embodied agency of youth' (Burke 2000:211).

These local-global tensions feed into generational conflict because of simplistic binary conceptualisations of elders as keepers of traditional value systems, knowledge and customary practice vis-à-vis youths as carriers of disruptive social transformation and cultural innovations representing 'modernity'¹⁹. This plays out as a struggle between continuity and change (Durham 2000, Badsha 2002, Brown 1991, Diouf 2003, Okwema 2002, Jua 2003, Rea 1998, Frederiksen 2000, La Hausse 1990) which are often at the heart of inter-generational conflicts (Tlou 1994, Makoni and Stroeken 2002, Moller and Sotshongaye 2002, Makoni 2002, Toungara 1995, Ivaska 2005, Summers 2005, Burke 2000, Burgess 1999, Gable 2000, Bundy 1987). As a result of this

¹⁹ According to Gable (2000:201), 'Rather, the current fascination with youth reflects the way "modernity" is habitually theorized as a generational politics (Ortner 1998). It is routinely assumed that "modern" culture is defined by the disruptive creativity of "youth" in collective opposition to old authorities and old ways. "The young" in modern societies are associated with all that is revolutionary – from fashion to politics. By breaking the rules, "youth," if you will, make society, albeit a society which is often on the verge of self-destruction. Youth is emblematic of "modernity".'

friction, many African youths no longer respect their elders and even neglect their care; described as 'breakdown in the intergenerational contract in African society' (Van der Geest 1997, Apt 1996, Cattell 1994, 1997, Moller 1994). The conflict between youths and the post-independence generation in Africa manifests explicitly in the revolutionary actions of youths who 'participate in politics either as vanguards or plebeians' (Burgess 2003:4), or 'saboteurs' (Durham 2000:113). Youths have thus been at the forefront of struggles to oust repressive political regimes, colonialism or neo-colonialism (Burgess 2003, Klopp and Orina 2002, Summers 2005, Naidoo 1991, Bundy 1987, Moyer 2005, Zewde 2002, Jankowski 1975) either as child soldiers, or the mass support for religious influence in national politics (Glaser 1998a, Cruise O'Brien 1996, Diouf 1996, Burgess 2003, Villalon 1994).

A few studies (e.g. Bundy 1987) highlight cooperation across generations. Furthermore, Gable's (2000) study among Manjaco youths shows that intergenerational relationships with modernity and 'tradition' are not always wrought with conflict, but can be more complex. La Hausse's (1990) discussion of *amalaita* gangs shows migrant youths creatively refashioning customary rural Zulu youth subculture in their new urban spaces. Ignatowski's (2004) study reveals rural Cameroonian youths turning 'to the cultural resources of their ethnic communities, cultural forms associated with old, privileged males'²⁰.

²⁰ She cautions that although 'youth culture is usually characterised by its innovativeness, modernity, and high-tech veneer..., this formulation makes it more difficult to appreciate forms of cultural innovation by youth what do not look forward, but rather build upon tradition – those forms that capitalise on idioms representing the past (Ignatowski 2004:411).'

3.1.1.5 'Yet to hatch': the framing of youth in policy

In literature about policy rhetoric and official public discourse, youths are variously discussed as half-baked individuals. This assigned position has implications for how policies and programmes concerning youth are designed. Excerpts from literature highlight this observation:

'The categorisation in policy terms of children and youth as passive, incompetent and incomplete has relegated them to an almost invisible and dependent status within the family... they are viewed first as receiving, costing and consuming and not as contributors to society and the economy, and second as dependent on adults' (Badsha 2002:12).

'The government reinforces this valuation by marking youth as "future leaders", a "precious resource for the future of our nation," and in need of opportunities to "reach their full potential" (Burke 2000:211).

'...the rhetorical flourish in official discourse that refers to them as the "leaders of tomorrow"...Relegating them to this status deprives them of any alternatives in the present, prompting them to defer all their aspirations at this transitional phase in their lives to the period when they will attain maturity' (Jua 2003:17).

'There are three senses in which there is a relationship between the state, youth culture and *Area Boys*. First, the state is the domain of the ideological construction of specific identities, values and ideas that shape the culture of society and the way the youth is factored into that statist project is very significant for study, both in terms of its actions and responses. Second, the twin projects of statism (as expressed in state authoritarianism) and adjustment reforms are important to the study of urban youth crime and violence and the phenomenon of *Area Boys*. Third, the question of *Area Boys* opens up a terrain of discourse that raises such issues as the social responsibility of the state to citizens, the whole legal question of duty and obligation, the issue of antecedents and

consequences of action, and the issue of loyalty and acceptable moral conduct' (Momoh 2000: 182).

Because I am at once an outsider as analyst, and an insider as an African youth, it is important to clarify my position. Transcending the pessimism and resignation within depictions of African youths as doomed, without prospects, victims, criminals, despondent, powerless, stupid and controlled, I chose to frame them as active actors reconfiguring hope amidst chaos, choosing survival when death prevails, and navigating successes within constrained circumstances. I took my queue from Bucholtz (2002:535):

'The problem-based perspective on youth focuses on young people's actions as social violations rather than agentive interventions into ongoing sociocultural change. By contrast, the best work on the challenges facing youth emphasizes their own acts of cultural critique and cultural production in the face of often untenable situations'.

3.1.2 Youth – pregnant with multiple local meanings

The preceding literature review confirms the flux in meanings associated with 'youth'; largely dependent on different contextual factors including the historical, geographical, social, cultural, and conceptual (see Burgess 2005, Aguilar 1998). This thesis adopted Brennan's (2006:221) conceptualisation of youth as '...both an abstracted social category and an empirically definable group whose members are eligible to participate in specific institutions.' I narrowed down to this conceptual definition during the writing-up stage of the entire ethnographic process. However during fieldwork, the working definition of 'youth' was provided by the local members of the study areas I lived in. Instead of determining on my own and prior to interacting with the communities, which biological or social groups the label embraced, I chose to investigate their emic understandings. In this way I was also generating empirical data specific to this Gambian local setting.

December 2003 in Yallal Tankonjalla, I met Alimatou Jallow, a beautiful Fula whose physical youthfulness was immediately evident. The combination of her apparent vibrancy, her eager curious look, the firm pointedness of her young breasts and an abundance of energy in her gait – were my undisguised pointers to her seeming classificatory fit as typical youth. Physically, she was an icon of budding youth. She participated in the discussions as enthusiastically as most of the other girls; sometimes stating the consensual, other times highlighting her narrative of personal experience, and occasionally challenging some expressed views. During focus group discussions, I decided that Alimatou qualified for further investigation in individual interviews.

During the repeat individual interviews, both Ousman and myself were variously shocked by our findings that filled the gaps in our information about Alimatou. Yes, she was a teenager. She was seventeen years old to be exact. Yes, she physically presented as a youth. And yet her social, cultural and sexual experiences immediately cast her into the position, roles and functions of an adult within her context, (or indeed any other context). We learnt that Alimatou was married as the second wife to Kelipha Sall – an agricultural extension worker whose urban employment demanded dual residence of him. Thus Alimatou, his second wife, was maintained within the family compound in the provinces where she lived with Kelipha's parents, siblings and other affines. Alimatou also had two children, one of whom she fed from the breasts during an in-depth interview we were conducting. Thus, although she was constitutionally a youth, Alimatou simultaneously had the bodily experiences and the social embodiment of an adult woman. Hers was a body that had twice successfully traversed the physical processes of conception, carrying a pregnancy full term, labour, delivery, postnatal healing, and breastfeeding. Alimatou's person had enacted and embodied the social cultural rites of passage - namely betrothal, marriage and motherhood; thereby marking her as an adult distinct from children within her local context.

I will dwell for a while on the resonance of reactions from my research assistant and myself. Our immediate categorisation of Alimatou was – 'youth'. Our mutually echoed surprise on discovering more about Alimatou was mainly because her widely nuanced experiences

challenged any neatly bounded and/ or fixed definitions of the notion of youth. Apparently we had to reflect about the different representations of youth or un-youth that we had encountered so far. It was critical that we returned to the drawing board to reconsider a conceptual working definition. Why were we both hesitant and suddenly uncertain about Alimatou's youth when we discovered she was also a wife and a mother of two? Does a general understanding of youth tap into stereotypes of sexual immaturity, reproductive inexperience, and assumptions of lack of social responsibilities²¹? In fact, wasn't our reaction typical? If so, typical to what group of people? I wondered whether it was possible that other community development workers, reproductive health providers, youth workers, policy makers, and implementers, as well as programme designers, interventionists and actors involved in service delivery for and on behalf of YOUTHS, were also operating along a working definition of a target group that was more stereotypical than grounded in contextual realities. Was this mismatch between preconceived conceptualisations (often conceived, discussed and approved of in the confines of gerontocratic academic spaces in ivory towers including universities, international planning offices, disciplinary conferences, corridors of multinational youth organisations, etc) of youth and the actual practically lived realities of youths in diverse contexts 'on the ground' much more frequent than revealed in youth-oriented literature and discourse? Would it be possible to formulate a crosscutting conceptual definition of youth, without actually collating the diverse faces, forms, presentations, enacted meanings and nuances of the concept 'youth'?

Rather than imposing my own definition(s), I decided to map out the range of nuances, meanings and forms presented by those who self-identified as youths, as well as those who were identified as youth by members of their communities. This flexibility generated rich emic data that facilitated the exploration of local definitions of YOUTH.

²¹ Contrast this to Nolte's (2004) definition quoted above. Was our surprise unique?

3.1.3 Youth in national policy and programmes

A key legal instrument that is both a forerunner to and a guideline for policy formulation is the national Constitution. According to the constitution of the Republic of The Gambia (1997)²², National Youth Service is a requirement for citizens who have attained eighteen years of age (see article 196.1), the rights to protection from economic exploitation are for children under sixteen years (article 29.2), the right to vote was reduced from twenty-one to eighteen years in the revised constitution (article 39.1, 39.3). Regarding marriage, the constitution abandons specifying numerical ages and ambiguously states in article 27.1, 'Men and women of full age and capacity shall have the right to marry and found a family'. What is 'full age'? Who determines it? How? Isn't it relative and dependent on circumstances? Is it negotiable? Are youth of 'full age' or not? Does this full age equate in practice to adulthood?

The constitutional definition is similar in content to the current revised National Youth Policy 1999 – 2008 (1998) which states:

The Youth policy defines youth as all young Gambian men and women aged between 13 and 30. Young men and women in this category experience a variety of influences and transitions that deserve special attention within the National Youth Policy.

For example between the ages of 13 and 14 most girls will have reached sexual maturity and between the ages of 14 and 16 boys will have reached adolescence and beginning of the development of personal identities. In addition, the post adolescence period is an age of transition to adulthood as well as a transition from school to either the world of work or indeed the world of unemployment. During the period of 13 to 30 years, young people in the Gambia require a variety of social, economic and practical support to realize their full potential.

The policy recognizes that there may be young men and women falling outside the 13 to 30 years age category who experience similar circumstances to those defined in the document. Such young men and women will, within a given context, be included in the implementation of various programs identified in this policy. For instance a 10-year old girl child will not be excluded from adolescent reproductive health programs on account of her age. Similarly, a 32-year-old entrepreneur, will not be excluded from a micro credit programme on account of age.

This policy, therefore, will be flexible enough to accommodate young persons who may be below 13 as well as those who may be above 30 depending on the nature of programs being implemented.

Figure 3.3 Excerpt from the National Youth Policy 1999-2008

²² The current constitution was adopted on 24th April 1970, suspended in July 1994, revised and approved by national referendum and then adopted on 8th August 1996. It was reinstated in January 1997, and last amended in 2001.

Chronological age in years is central to national, constitutional, legal and policy criteria of inclusion or exclusion from the youth classificatory group. However in contrast to the assumed knowledge of personal age that this definition presupposes, several youths in the rural study area, but also many uneducated urban youths reported that they did not know their actual age. They often gave guestimates.

Another issue compromising chronological age as a valid indicator or criterion of belonging or exclusion into a bounded category was the frequent finding of individuals who had more than one 'official age'. They selectively presented a different official age to different audiences, depending on what was at stake; what there was to gain or lose by having the 'correct age'.

Salim Nyasi first worked with me as a fieldwork driver. Smallish in build, he was also tall and occasionally spotted a goatee beard. When I first asked him about his age in October 2002, he said he was twenty-eight years old. Delighted to be working with an age-mate, I rushed to tell him that I had also turned twenty-eight in June of that year. Later on, when I visited Salim at his father's village, I met several of his family members. Salim introduced me to his siblings, some of whom I was told were junior in age to him. I was interested in the revelation that one of them was thirty-five years old. Unknown to Salim, I immediately realised the disparity between the age he claimed and what I stumbled upon during this visit. I made a note in my diary to tactfully investigate Salim's age. Later, I discovered that he had three official ages: a different one on his taxation card, national identity card, and birth certificate. Each age was verified, and certified as official because it was on official public documentation of identity. Salim Nyasi was not unique because I found similar documentations of different official ages among other youths.

For me, it was at school. You see those days in the early eighties, you could not start school if you were too old. So the best thing was for the parents to tell you that you are seven years old when in fact you were maybe ten or eleven years. It was a problem for me because when I was in the village, I only attended *madarasa*. And so when I came to

the Kombos, my uncle took me to grade 1. I could not compete with those young children because they had gone to nursery school and kindergarten. But then I tried. If someone looked closely at me, they would know that I was much older than those children. But then it was the only way to go to school. So I have that age because it stays with you. You go through primary school, lower secondary and upper secondary and even college with the date of birth which you started with in Grade 1. So, the birth certificate which I got from the village says that I was born in August 1969. But then my school papers say that I was born in August 1974. **(20 year-old male)**

Many youths who presented multiple ages were educated to a point, because parents or guardians often 'adjusted' children's ages in order to meet the school-qualifying age-limit²³. Youths with travel prospects also often manipulated their age identifier. In urban and rural areas, popular reasoning was that younger youths had higher chances of getting travel visas – particularly to the cherished West (Nyanzi et al. 2005). Therefore the official dates of birth entered into passports were often far from true representations of actual chronological age, but rather cleverly calculated misrepresentations intended to aid easier visa acquisition. Among my more widely-travelled study participants, some youths had different dates of birth entered into different passports. These included but were not exclusive to *bumsters* or *semesters*.

Participant observation confirmed that with money, official identification – including national identity card, passport, voter's registration card, residential permits, marriage certificates or birth certificates – could be readily manipulated to re-present particular pictures which were not necessarily true. One individual could possess several versions of identification documents, created under varying circumstances, and to meet different conditions. Therefore even when age

²³ Similar cut-off age-limits were practised in Uganda when I was getting admission into boarding primary school. Unlike Salim who was too old, I was too young to meet the qualifying age of seven, so I missed admission to the first school of my choice. I had to study for a year in a day school, as I waited to clock seven years in order to get admitted into the boarding school.

was validated by national identity documents, it was still a highly problematic indicator or qualifier for either inclusion or exclusion criteria for the category 'youth' in this study.

Therefore the additional clause²⁴ to the definition of youth in the revised National Youth Policy 1999 – 2008 was highly appropriate, and suited my definitional purposes. The flexibility it provided empowered individuals to self-determine whether or not they belonged to the design of a particular programme, rather than having boundaries imposed upon them by others.

3.1.4 Youths formulating policy

The Gambia is hailed as a 'youthful nation' in policy documents produced by departments of state. Having seized power through military coup, at the tender age of twenty-nine, President Yahya Jammeh was the youngest head of state in Africa. Being a youth himself, the president's official rhetoric, public discussions, and political propaganda often thrust youths at the heart of The Gambia's development. He initiated policies and initiatives to enhance the potential of diverse marginalised youths, as a strategy to engage them more fully in national development.

Interviews with policymakers involved with youths in The Gambia, revealed three distinct categories of people namely a) those claiming youthful identity based on chronological age less than thirty years, b) those above thirty years who justified their youthfulness as defined beyond numerical years, and c) those older than thirty-five years who did not identify with youth but rather argued it was critical that youths received guidance, control and exemplars from adults. For example Mr. Sebastian Njie²⁵, the director of the National Youth Services Scheme during fieldwork believed that it was essential for adults to participate in moulding of youths, and thus advocated for adults and youths co-partnering in policy formulation, programme design and implementation on behalf of youths.

²⁴ '...This policy, therefore, will be flexible enough to accommodate young persons who may be below 13 as well as those who may be above 30 depending on the nature of programs being implemented.'

²⁵ He was also a key link for me to diverse youth groups affiliated to the NYSS. As my patron, his reference always gave access to stakeholders who were otherwise closeted or highly inaccessible.

3.1.4.1 Elitist bias

There was an elitist bias in the composition of youths who actively participated in drawing up policies relevant to youths. This elitism permeated through all levels of national policy ranging from small villages and hamlets, to divisions, and the entire nation. When queried about this selectivity bias, members of this sub-group of youths often dwelt on the assumption that it took a certain level of education attainment to ably engage with the intricacies of policy formulation, implementation and revision.

Likewise, youths who were uneducated or had lower education levels tended to believe this dominant supposition. I often encountered explanations such as ‘what can I say about this when I have no education?’, ‘let the educated ones represent us in the meeting with the visiting government officials’, ‘the people who can discuss our affairs for us are there in Banjul. They speak English as if they are *Toubabs*.’

Even in cases where *madarassa* was the only available established education system, such as in some hamlets and villages in North Bank Division, youth leadership was mostly left for the more educated people. The prevalence of this elitist bias has implications for interventions aimed at youth empowerment. In order to raise youths’ self-esteem and encourage more of them to actively participate in issues of national development or policy formulation, it is imperative to provide them with the highly-elevated formal education. Alternatively an intervention that debunks the myth that only the educated can participate in policy formulation, is critical to empower those who are not educated as well as those with lower levels of education.

Statistical analysis of the demographic profiles of the youths involved in managing youths affairs at the national level, including policy debate and formulation, programme design and implementation, advocacy, training etc, highlights the apparent class selectivity of persons representing and working on behalf of youths. The demographic characteristics of officials with seats at the National Youth Council, the National Youth Services Scheme, the Department of State for Youth and Sports, the National Youth Forum indicate that the majority have post-

tertiary education levels, alternative sources of income and high mobility levels within and beyond the national boundaries. The majority were located in urban areas during fieldwork. Although these officials came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, the majority were Muslim, which is in agreement with the national demographic profile. What was striking about these officials was an apparent elitist bias. 'What about the rural, uneducated, unemployed youths?' I found myself asking during the latter key informant interviews with policymakers. I wondered how come the rural uneducated and unemployed youths were not represented among those who debated, formulated, reviewed and even enacted policies that concerned youths in The Gambia.

3.1.4.2 Pyramid structure of representation

Data from the Department of State for Youths, Culture and Sports (DSYCS), National Youth Council (NYC), and National Youth Services Scheme (NYSS) revealed that the current National Youth Policy 1999-2008 was formulated through a process that aimed at embracing the diverse range of opinions held by as wide as possible a cross-section of youths who were residents, citizens, and nationals of The Gambia. Some of my key informants actually participated in the processes leading to the development and passing of this policy. They reported that the policy process achieved a high level of representation from the grassroots. Efforts were made to hear the voices of the un-reached masses of youths in the country. This policy process was especially facilitated by the pyramid structure of the NYC.

According to Chambers (1983, 1997), in highly structured societies, the process of policy formulation is often hijacked by those who are perceived as powerful including the educated, property-owners, the more respected families with widely known lineages of origin, etc. He cautions against quickly assuming that one has reached the marginalised spheres in society when implementing and evaluating representation and participation models²⁶. The flipside of attempting

²⁶ Following from this argument, I asked, 'How does one assess that the hard-to-reach have been reached? How representative was the process of formulating The Gambia's National Youth Policy? Who spoke? Who was listened to? Who did not speak? Who was present? Who was seen? Who was invited? Who was silent? What about those without the language of the elite?' When claims of voicing on behalf of the

to be as inclusive as possible such that the lower echelons of society are reached and represented, was well-expressed by one NYC officer:

‘Of course these people cannot read. They cannot write. They can’t even express themselves in English. Definitely we can listen to them in the local vernaculars. But that is time-consuming. It is wasteful. All what I am saying is it is very difficult to organise them or even to coordinate them. They are petty. They dwell on small-small points for a long time. Sometimes I believe it is better that we do it on their behalf. We need to think for them.’

Thus, while some policymakers and enactors believed in the power of meaningful representation from the grassroots, and its significance to the policy process, others wrestled with the practicalities of making it work.

3.1.4.3 Generation clashes

The patronising and paternalistic element inherent within the above quote is similar to that of gerontocratic adults who variously assumed that youths cannot act entirely on their own to make correct decisions for themselves. From the narratives of these adults, it was evident that they believed that youths always needed approval and guidance of adults. The ‘After-all-we-were-once-where-they-are’ syndrome was often their primary justification for taking this stance. ‘Been there, done it’, ‘Been through it all and thus have the wisdom of experience’ were common rejoinders from such adults. Their insistence was interpreted by various students as a symptom of institutionalised systematic norms that establish and maintain adults’ patronising of youths.

While some youths appreciated the involvement of adults and elders in their affairs, others challenged it and portrayed them as meddlers who poked their old noses into business that was none of their concern.

voiceless are made, it is important to problematise whose voice receives loud projection. In response to related questions, some of the actors involved in the formulation processes of the National Youth Policy 1999 – 2008, assured me that, ‘There were many questions taken round the nation before the document was formed. The questions generated discussions and debate about issues pertaining to youths from diverse local sub-cultures. A number of round forums were held to brainstorm critical factors.’

‘Imagine, even our very own policies and programmes are out of our hands. These adults decide everything for us. I suggest that they should retire because they are tired. No wonder they cook-up things that are not appropriate for us,’ said Abdou, a nineteen-year-old student.

Another line of argument from youths who questioned the involvement of adults in national youth policies and programmes was that of appropriateness. They stressed that because many adults traversed the fluid borders of youth a while ago, the understandings, appreciations, and interpretations they brought to youth issues possibly lacked the requisite cutting-edge in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and timeliness. ‘Times have changed!’ these youths argued.

3.1.4.4 The gendered nature of youth participation

Male!

Disgustingly all male!

Females in the background:

Voiceless, invisible females.

Females scuttling in the shadows!

Oh the head-bent females.

But why, Mama?

Why now?

My above sentiments were captured in verse as I sat through a stakeholders’ meeting in Banjul, along with several youth leaders from both rural- and urban-based youth organisations. My ethnographic fieldwork variously confirms this tendency of female inactivity. In activities organised for youths, men and boys dominated spheres of involvement, participation, influence, decision-making, leadership, articulation, etc. Women and girls were often invisible or present but silent. The male youths mostly came across as proactive. Even when both genders were present, male youths seemed ‘more present’. Their female counterparts mostly needed prompting, cajoling, or drawing out, to get involved and open-up.

During the early part of fieldwork, when I was still negotiating entry into study communities, and access to potential study participants, I noticed that a large proportion of the pool of people I first met was male. When I asked to meet the youths especially the villages and hamlets, the *Alkalos* or their representatives always first introduced me to a large group of young men and boys with a few young women and girls.

‘Where are the young women?’ I frequently found myself asking the local elders, or the attending members.

Furthermore, content analysis of a cross-section of official documents from youth organisations confirmed that the majority of leadership positions were occupied by young men and boys. Admittedly there were some females – though a minority. This tendency yielded some reflection on my part. Was the presence of these few female youth leaders yet another case of political correctness? Was it mere whitewash in the form of gender mainstreaming whereby females have to fill a specific quota of leadership positions? What interpretations was I to make of these data? Which of these among my interpretations resonated with the local understandings?

In my meetings with local youth leaders, it was evident that female youths mostly did not get actively involved. They might fill positions in the hierarchy and organograms, but they did not really participate at the forefront. Why did I never meet a female youth policymaker? Admittedly I did meet some female officials who were working on youth policies and programmes. However they were in support capacities of secretaries, assistants, aides, messengers, cleaners or tea-girls. There were hardly any key female youths at the helm of leadership.

I identified an apparent gap in the application of gender analytical frameworks to youth leadership. This confirms Abbink’s (2005:6) statement, ‘Youth comprises males and females. The gender dimension, however, is often relegated to second place in studies and policies about youth in Africa... The gender perspective is not yet sufficiently integrated in youth studies.’ It is important to conduct a gender analysis of various issues pertaining to youths; that is over and

beyond sexualities and health. There is an urgent need to unpack issues of the glass-ceiling in policy-making processes. Why are there hardly any female policymakers in the arena of youth policy in The Gambia? What are the structural hindrances? What are the contextual obstacles?²⁷

3.2 Sexuality

'Sexuality is not an object to be retrieved, much less a coherent one; neither is it an essential cultural emblem.' John and Nair (1998:7)

In order to ably explore human sexualities, it is imperative to understand major theoretical developments, have ample exposure to relevant scholarly discourses, and knowledge of relevant bodies of literature. Thereafter one can make an informed choice about their critical stance as a sexuality scholar with a contribution to make to precedent conversations within the sub-discipline. The following section precisely presents a selective review²⁸ of the above factors.

3.2.1 Shifting paradigms in sexuality research

Several sexuality scholars (Black 2000, Parker et al. 2000, Wilton 2000) report that for long, the study of human sexuality was largely ignored as a focus for social research and inquiry. Psychology is a notable exception. Instead it was relegated to the realm of the biomedical sciences, perhaps because of the seemingly intimate link between the body and the experience of sexuality. However, the last twenty-five years have witnessed an increase in social and

²⁷ These questions were beyond the scope of my thesis. I could pursue them in the post-doctorate phase. Several questions arose from my critical engagement with the data generated about youth involvement in leadership processes in the study area. How do the needs of the rural, the poor, the uneducated, the female, etc and other such marginalised youths reach the policy benches? What provisions are in place to include the priorities and realities of those youths who are not represented among those who enact policies? Certainly there was a policymaking system that fitted within the established contextual scheme. It was evidently in operation. The question was about its shortcomings. How could this system be more representative, inclusive, accessible to the less visible, the unreachable, the poor, the less educated, and those who were excluded by their social, cultural and economic circumstances?

²⁸ Selective because not all that is available is relevant to the purposes of the thesis. Review of literature was also restricted within the limitations of time, access to historical literature, and appropriation of bodies of knowledge or literature that are articulated in languages other than English, Luganda or Kiswahili.

behavioural analyses of sexuality. Various explanations and reasons are provided in the literature for this development.

According to Vance (1991), Parker and Gagnon (1995), disciplines in the social sciences including anthropology were struggling to find new ways of understanding the changing post-modern worlds. Thus the resultant paradigm shift and new emphasis on domains that were once considered relatively 'private' – or outside the realm of serious social investigation – were increasingly understood as being socially shaped.

Developments in queer theory studies, the feminist movement, gay and lesbian movements in Europe and North America expanded the frontiers of investigation into sexuality beyond the medicalised gaze to the social sciences particularly political analysis, cultural interpretation, human rights, law and advocacy, behavioural studies and group dynamic analysis (Wilton 2000).

The broad social implications of global issues of over-population, reproductive health and the HIV/AIDS epidemic established the emergence of the study of sexuality as central to contemporary debates (Correa 1994, Ginsberg and Rapp 1995, Lancaster and di Leonarado 1997, Parker and Gagnon 1995, Petchesky and Judd 1998).

This alternative current in sexuality research, which emphasised the shifting from the medicalised study of sexuality in social research was an important achievement of social constructionist approaches (see Parker and Aggleton 1998, Black 2000). Foucault's (1976-1984) work, in which he unearths the discursive roots of sexuality using a wealth of historical materials, forms the basis of constructionist approaches to sexuality. He argues that the meaning(s) of sexual acts are to be found in surrounding discourses and not in the acts themselves. Within the social constructionist approach to the theoretical study of sexuality, there are tensions for example between the Foucauldian perspective (Foucault 1990) and feminist critiques (for example Hartsock 1990, Ramazanoglu 1993, Ramazanoglu and Holland 1993) who argue that Foucault inadequately tackles issues of power differentiation in relation to constructing discourse and

infection (see for example Carballo et al. 1989, Chouinard and Albrecht 1989, Turner et al. 1989, Cleland and Ferry 1995). This gave rise to a plethora of behavioural research into such areas as the individualistic determinants of health behaviour, rational decision making processes, etc, geared towards providing empirical bases for informing public health interventions. The emphasis of these behavioural studies was linking individual psychology to sexual behaviour. Several theoretical models including the 'Health Belief Model' (Becker and Joseph 1988), 'Theory of Reasoned Action' (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980), 'Social Learning Theory' (Bandura 1977), 'AIDS risk reduction model', 'Attitudes, Norms and Self-efficacy Model', 'Social Support Model' (Gilles 1996) were developed, tested and formed the basis for interventions. The logic behind this approach was that increased knowledge and awareness of HIV risk would lead to rational decision-making, leading to adoption of risk reduction sexual behaviour, which would open the door to a decrease in HIV/AIDS rates, a decline in the epidemic, reductions in transmission of sexually transmitted infections, a fall in epidemics of teenage pregnancies and drastic drops in the population explosion taking place in low developing countries (Aggleton 1996, Cleland and Ferry 1995, Carballo et al. 1989, Bancroft 1997, Turner et al. 1989, Turner et al. 1990).

However, with time several behavioural studies (for example Zellner 2003, Barden-O'Fallon 2004, MacPhail and Campbell 2001, Lagarde et al. 1996,) revealed that information alone was insufficient to produce risk-reducing behaviour change; highlighting the limitations of individual psychology (reasoned persuasion) as the basis for behavioural interventions in diverse socio-cultural settings (Parker et al. 2000, Aggleton 1996, Cohen 1991, Parker 1994, 1996). Issues surrounding the ineffectiveness of research instruments and intervention strategies, the difficulties of translating or adapting research protocols for cross-cultural applications, and the radical differences in understandings of sexual expression and substance use in various societies or even sub-cultures of a broad society, were some of the major challenges. It became evident that far more complex social, cultural and structural factors mediate the structure of risk and impact upon sexual conduct, in combination with dynamics of individual psychology (Parker et al. 2000,

Aggleton 1996, Aggleton and Coates 1995, Parker 1994, 1996, Sweat and Dennison 1995, Watney 1990).

Therefore the influences of interactionist sociology, cultural anthropology, radical social psychology, women's studies, queer theory, gay and lesbian studies resulted in a major paradigm shift in sexuality research. Attention turned to the broader social and cultural structures and meanings shaping or constructing sexual experience in particular settings. For many social science scholars of sexuality, there was an apparent shift from individual psychology to a new concern with intersubjective cultural meanings related to sexuality, the shared and collective qualities of social persons integrated within distinct and diverse cultures '...not as atomised or isolated individuals....' (Parker et al. 2000:6).

Such research goes beyond calculation of behavioural frequencies and identification of statistical correlates of sexual risk behaviour to examining what sex means to the parties involved, the context in which it takes place, the structure and scripting of sexual encounters, indigenous classification systems that define and structure sexuality, and the sexual cultures and subcultures present or emergent within particular societies (see for example Morgan and Reid 2003, Samuelsen 2003, Khan 2002, Abraham 2002, Nyanzi et al. 2001, Obermeyer 2000, Taylor 2000, Carter and Clift 2000, Thomas 2000, Nnko and Pool 1997, Aggleton 1996, Parker 1994, 1995, Herdt and Lindenbaum 1992, Kippax and Crawford 1993, Parker et al. 1991). There is a shift from the assumed universality of meaning of biological categories of epidemiological analysis characteristic of Western biomedicine and public health (Alonson and Koreck 1989, Aggleton 1996a, Daniel and Parker 1993, Herdt 1997, Lancaster 1992, 1995, 1997, Patton 1990, de Zalduondo 1991) to focussing more carefully on local categories and classification; from an 'outsider' to 'insider' perspective'; and from the 'experience-distant' concepts of science to the 'experience-near' concepts that members of specific cultures use to understand and interpret their own reality (Geertz 1983, Parker 1989, 1991, 1994, 1995).

3.2.2 Anthropology and sexuality

In practice, anthropology as a discipline has rarely dealt with sex and sexual desire. Anthropologists have, unquestionably, cornered the market in such ancillary issues as kinship, descent, and marriage, but most writings on these issues have avoided dealing with sex – human mating – as a hot and lusty phenomenon. Instead, sanitized sex is termed “courtship behaviour”, “marriage” practices, or “alliance”. Human beings can identify all these categories of behaviour and engage in their related practices, yet they are also driven by and engage in “love”, “lust,” and “pleasure”, emotions or psychobiological states that anthropologists are apparently ill-equipped to study... Similarly, anthropologists find it hard to come to grips with other sensual and emotional issues such as ecstasy and pleasure, which although experienced and even documented (e.g. Macaloon and Csikszentmihalyi 1983), they do not deal with seriously if at all. The same is undoubtedly true regarding sex and sexuality, which perhaps in the interest of “scientific objectivity” have been translated from bodily experience into the theoretical realms of “kinship”, “marriage,” and “alliance”. The few classical anthropologists who have tried to portray sexual attractiveness and the practices of sex did so in “throw-away papers” hidden in obscure journals and never, ever cited. Ashkenazi and Markowitz (1999:11)

Some sexuality scholars (Caplan ed 1987:13, Whitehead 1986:109, Davis and Whitten 1987, Jones 1999) stress that for long sex did not constitute a primary area of focus or interest in anthropology. Others (for example Markowitz and Ashkenazi 1999, John and Mair 1998) claim that sex and sexuality are not novel topics in anthropology. They also stress that this discipline has gone about the venture with such prudishness, safety and in ways that would protect the academic credibility and integrity of the individuals involved. Notably in the early stages of the discipline were Bronislaw Malinowski's (1927, 1929, 1955) and Margaret Mead's (1928, 1961,

1963) cross-sectional study of gender and sexuality. Malinowski (1929) was the first to acknowledge that sex dominated every aspect of culture and was a sociological and cultural force – not merely a bodily relation of two individuals. Thereby he pointed out the centrality of sexuality in anthropological studies. However in the main, conservative Victorian values about the inappropriateness of public discourses about sex stifled its academic discussion and analysis for ages.

Anthropologists studying Africa were further restrained from exploring sexuality because of the fear that they would perpetuate stereotypes of erotic African sexuality. Ethnographers in Africa dismissed analysis of sexual behaviour because methodologically it was perceived as voyeuristic and ethically intrusive (Young 1994). Bleek's (1976) work among the Akan and Schuster (1979) in Lusaka are some of the known exceptions (both quoted in Young 1994).

Prior to the advent of HIV/AIDS, anthropological studies of human sexuality were limited due to the disciplinary prejudice - that sexuality was not a legitimate field of anthropological inquiry (Vance 1991), - which made related research practically challenging specifically because of lack of funds to support interested anthropologists.

However the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic necessitated new approaches to understanding the dynamics of sexual behaviour, bringing on board the methodological and theoretical contribution of anthropology as a discipline and medical anthropology as a sub-discipline. Anthropological methods of research and analysis have helped in the identification of socio-cultural, political, economic, religious and historical factors influencing sexual behaviour and contributing to rising HIV transmission rates (Gysels et al. 2002, Luke and Kurz 2002a, Gysels et al. 2001, Huygens et al. 1996, Heise and Elias 1995, Toman 1994, Ankrah et al. 1994, Ankrah 1993, Farmer et al. 1993, Gupta and Weiss 1993, McGrath et al. 1993, Schopper et al. 1993, Standing 1992, McGrath 1992, Ulin 1992, Green 1992, Vance 1991). Furthermore, anthropological input results into the development of more culturally appropriate and context-specific models for HIV prevention

(Tadele 2006, Parker et al. 2000, Kippax et al. 1993, Aggleton 1996, Parker 1994, 1996, Kippax and Crawford 1993, Pickering et al. 1992, 1993a).

3.2.3 Caldwell's thesis of an 'African sexuality'

Sexual culture is a fundamental concept to analysing sexual behaviour. Parker et al. (1991) define sexual culture as the system of meaning, knowledge, beliefs and practices that structure sexuality in different social contexts. It emphasises the significance of social, cultural, political, economic and religious factors in the construction of sexuality. The concept of sexual culture in this context refers to the general expression of cultural behaviour and not individual expressions of one's sexuality. However, Parker et al. (1991:79-80) acknowledge the fact that individuals, cognizant of the cultural ideals of sexuality, do express variation as long as they are within the parameters that are socially defined as normative. Implicit tensions between collective and individual expressions of sexuality could arise.

For long, the culture of African peoples has been provided as a causal explanation for the high prevalence and incidence rates of HIV/AIDS on the African continent (Gausset 2002). Special reference is made here to the work of Caldwell and his Australian National University colleagues, (as well as other 'Caldwellians') who underscore the traditional cultural practices, the African sexual system, values and attitudes of sub-Saharan Africans as being responsible for the rampant spread of the pandemic. Of particular relevance is Caldwell et al.'s (1989, 1991) incredible thesis of 'a distinct and internally coherent African system embracing sexuality, marriage, and much else...' (1989:187). This 'African system of sexuality' is characterised by the importance of the following universals: ancestry, descent and the maintenance of lineage, lineal inheritance systems, female dominated agriculture, and fertility. Emphasis is placed upon the 'freedom of female sexuality in Africa', due to 'lack of moral and institutional limitations placed on sexual practices'. African women are reported to have 'a fair degree of permissiveness towards premarital relations' and 'surreptitious extramarital relationships are not the point of

sin...' and therefore not punished. Furthermore, African women's sexual networking patterns are blamed for the rampant spread of AIDS.

Among the major critics of this thesis are Le Blanc et al. (1991) who point out the vast methodological flaws inherent within Caldwell et al.'s (1989) study including the absence of explicit criteria of inclusion or exclusion of the anthropological literature used as secondary sources of data, the recourse to studies spanning a long period from the 1920s to the 1970s without recognition of the historical change and its impacts, generalisations based on very few cases, the inappropriateness of the central piece of supporting evidence – the Molnos collection, and ignoring the underpinnings of the economics of female sexuality in Africa. They refer to various conflicting ethnographic studies as evidence of the social regulation imposed upon African women's sexuality, and highlight how studies that contradicted Caldwell's thesis were omitted from his data. For them, there is no evidence to corroborate the claim that a distinct African sexual system exists (Le Blanc et al. 1991:497). They point out that a review of all available studies would reveal a diverse picture of African sexuality which embraces a continuum of sexual patterns ranging from extreme puritanical to highly permissiveness sexual systems (1991:503).

Ahlberg (1994) further develops the criticism of Caldwell's thesis by asserting that they are hypocritical in arguing against using Western Eurocentric viewpoints to interpret African sexuality yet in the same breath contrasting African sexuality with the 'Eurasian system'. She further criticises how only female sexual activity was analysed without reference to male pre-marital and extra-marital sexual activity. Omitting political economic analysis of female rural-urban migration and resultant sexual activity is another weakness of Caldwell's thesis. Lastly, she states that sticking the label 'promiscuity' onto Africans is damaging to HIV/AIDS prevention efforts because it is loaded with western moralistic implications, which could suggest to Africans that their sexual culture is immoral. According to Ahlberg (1994:234-235), Africans, distrustful and sceptical of European imperatives due to the racist colonial legacy of trying to control

African bodies and their reproduction, may interpret this moralistic label as another strategy to denigrate African culture, restrict African sexuality and reduce African populations. An alternative approach she suggest would be to tap into people's local history to find more culturally appropriate ways of addressing problems inherent within their systems; therefore empowering themselves to change and define their own solutions.

Arnfred (2004) offers a feminist perspective that criticises Caldwell and colleagues for neglecting the sexual practice of the men in the societies they reviewed.

Caldwellians assume 'culture' is a homogenous concept set in stone; fixed, rigid and static. Furthermore, this analytical framework wrongly assumes that culture drastically impacts other social phenomena including health, while these social phenomena remain dormant. They neglect the two-way interaction between culture and health. They do not acknowledge the fact that culture is dynamic and it also evolves in response to social phenomena including illness and death.

3.3 Theory

Theorizing is an iterative process of creation, criticism, and re-creation. It is also an art.

Good theories are beautiful, and the process of creating this beauty is what art is all about.

Borgatti (1996)

Central to producing this ethnography is the attempt to generate grounded theory about meaningful sexuality among youths in The Gambia. According to Borgatti (1996), the important characteristics of a good theory include: mechanism or process, generality, truth, falsifiability, simplicity, fertility, and surprise.

3.3.1 'African theories of sexuality' versus 'an African sexuality'

Alluding to the western literature inevitably produces a further set of questions, anxieties and expectations. What about 'Indian' theories of sexuality, quite apart from an Indian sexuality? Why bring up Western theories at all?

To begin with the last question, our response would be that 'the West' is at once a particular geographical place, and a relation. From where we are, this relation is one of domination, and about as complicated as they come; to all intents and purposes, we are effectively located in the West. It is to the credit of feminists in India that they have refused to be silenced by accusations of being western-identified, and so unable to deal with the real India. Ironically enough, the very conception of the other of the West as being something to which western concepts do not apply (or only as an act of violation from which one must be redeemed) is itself a western legacy. Such constructions of cultural difference leave the West firmly in command. So too, do notions that theory is produced in the West, while we provide the local colour – an Indian Oedipus in contrast to its generic counterpart, for instance.

In our view, the theoretical questions before us are both more daunting and more exciting. We cannot but draw upon western theories, since they "determine at an unconscious level, the reading practices we bring to bear" on our work. But this still leaves us with the task of theorisation, which can never take the form of the application of a theory that one possesses in advance, but must resemble a process, a historical and political mode of conceptualising sexual economies that would be true to our experiences of an uneven modernity, calling for multiple levels of analysis and the forging of articulations between the global and local.

John and Nair (1998:6-7).

During the four years of my doctorate studies, I persistently sought for answers to the question, 'Are there any African theorisations of sexuality?'²⁹ The more I asked, the less I seemed to get.

Four occasions stand out:

- a) During an Africanist methodological forum organised by the CODESRIA³⁰ in January 2003, several discussants dwelt on the urgent need for contemporary African social scientists engaged in work related to HIV/AIDS to challenge the fallacies of the day about the sexuality of African peoples. I was particularly inspired to embark on historicising and problematising 'widespread racist discourses of the period that Africa had no history'³¹. I was personally challenged to contribute an Africanist perspective to the small body of anti-Caldwellian literature.
- b) In June 2004 my participation in a review session³² of theoretic frameworks employed to study the interactions between youths, sexuality and HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan facilitated me to identify a gap in the body of knowledge related to the sexual health of Africans. There was evidence of growing interest in research about the sexual health of youths in sub-Saharan Africa. However the studies were mainly committed to availing and assessing empirical data. They did not traverse into the realm of theorising African sexualities. Having identified this gap, I determined to work towards contributing to the theorisation of sexualities in Africa.
- c) I attended the Universiteit van Amsterdam's 2004 Summer Institute on Sexuality, Culture and Society. Participants came from diverse geographical spaces and all studied an aspect of human sexuality. Resource persons exposed us to many theories applied to sexuality scholarship. There

²⁹ I asked experts and amateurs, scholars and practitioners, natural scientists, social scientists and philosophers, academics and lay audiences, peasants and priests, etc. I begged an answer of the literature that I read. I held fast onto my search for African theorisations of the sexual domain like a demon-driven woman.

³⁰ The first methodological workshop held for the SIDA/SAREC funded initiative on Social Sciences and HIV/AIDS in Africa. See http://www.codesria.org/Links/Research/Collaborative_research/aids.htm

³¹ Personal communication from Prof. Adebayo Olukoshi.

³² This was during a workshop organised by the SSRC/CODESRIA/ ACLS/ South African National Research Foundation (NRF) for 2003-2004 fellows concentrating on the theme: 'Understanding exclusion, creating value: African youth in a global age – Youth, HIV/AIDS and social transformation'. See http://www.codesria.org/Links/News/announcements_2004/CODESRIA_SSRC_youth_review_workshop.pdf

was not a single theory that was African in flavour. I asked the specialists whether or not they knew of any African theories of sexuality. They countered my concerns with the call upon African scholars or those interested in Africa area studies, to begin conversations around this gap.

d) At a methodological workshop arranged by the SSRC³³ in March 2007, I was assured by a range of social scientists (both African and non-African) that there were no African theories of sexuality. 'You cannot start with nothing. So you need to go to the western theories of sexuality because we Africans do not yet have any theories on sexuality,' some participants echoed.

On reflection, there is widespread knowledge among scholars of the stereotypical 'African sexuality' (see Nyanzi 2006:34³⁴). However, there is scanty knowledge and awareness of existing African theories of sexualities. There are many ways of being African, and different expressions of sexualities. This calls for multiple theorisations of African sexualities. My point of departure was to use ethnography to get to local theorisations of African sexualities. I attempted to move beyond culturalist explanations dealing with exoticised practices which suggest the difference inherent within an 'African other' (Gausset 2002). I also aimed at moving beyond gender to sexuality - which is more than sexual and reproductive health. Because even the unlettered have deep theories on life, I turned to the locales in my study area for African philosophy, literature, popular culture, music. I prioritised emic perspectives which formed the basis of my grounded theory.

³³ A workshop organised for fellows of Social Science Research Council (SSRC)'s 2006-2007 fellowship on HIV/AIDS and Public Health Policy Research in Africa where theoretical concerns were raised and dealt with in depth. See <http://programs.ssrc.org/HIV/publications/Workshop%20Agenda%2010-03.pdf>.

³⁴ 'Homogenizing and 'othering' stereotypes abound concerning the sexuality and reproductive health of 'African men'. These include their supposedly larger-than-average sexual endowments, their unmatched sexual prowess, their animal-like virility, an affinity for high risk sexual behaviour, their disregard for contraception, and their proneness to HIV/AIDS. Relatively few voices have been raised on the African continent to challenge these assumptions. The most enduring stereotype is that of the African man's desire for children, which turn him into a 'baby-manufacturing machine.' Images are rife of such men, with their many wives and children.'

Chapter 4: Literature on sexualities of youths in sub-Saharan Africa

This chapter presents literature review of the sexualities of youths in Sub-Saharan Africa, since the advent of AIDS. Youth sexualities in Africa are increasingly the focus of study, particularly in relation to sexual and reproductive health. Systematic literature reviews include Marston and King 2006, Barker and Ricardo 2005, Dowsett et al. 1998, Neema et al. 2004. Efforts to intervene in the high levels of early pregnancy, teenage parenthood, falling sexual debut ages, unwanted pregnancies which often result in unsafe abortions and death, increase in sexually transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, etc. necessitated the concerted attention of academics, researchers, policy makers, programme deliverers at both local, regional, and international levels.

In most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the HIV/AIDS epidemic initially had a youthful face; the highest HIV rates corresponded to 'youth'. Consequently a lot of literature produced during the epidemic based on scientific enterprises to understand sexual behaviour of youths that predisposed them to higher levels of infection (Adih and Alexander 1999, UNAIDS 1999, Bohmer and Kirumira 2002, Eaton et al. 2003, Smith 2004, Plummer et al. 2004, Mitchell and Smith 2003, Andrew et al. 2003:120, Wight et al. 2006). This work often focussed on conceptualisations of 'high-risk social groups' indulging in 'high-risk sexual activities.' The bulk emphasised statistics. As discussed in chapter 3, these studies were premised on biomedical and psychological approaches to sexuality as located within the individual and the body. The models assumed that if the individual could be manipulated, then individual sexual behaviour would be changed for the better – thereby eliminating the epidemic.

While these earlier positivistic studies of youth sexuality had their uses and generated insightful information about the sexual terrain, their shortcomings soon came to the fore. Quantitative approaches to social phenomena were inadequate tools in the analysis of the complexly dynamic, highly nuanced, inherently shifting, and multi-layered concept of sexuality (Boyce et al. 2006, Spronk 2005). Not only was it a context-specific notion, it was also a highly politicised area of study because of its interplay with other sensitive notions – specifically race, gender, age, and locus. Therefore in search of alternative routes to meaningfully unpack local enactments and practices of sexuality, funders, scholars, researchers, policy-makers and interventionists steadily shifted to incorporating and appropriating

qualitative methods into sexuality scholarship. This resulted in 'moves away from biomedical and epidemiological constructions of individuals as members of groups designated as high risk (homosexual, intravenous drug-user) or low risk (heterosexual), towards understanding individuals as situated agents engaging in (high or low risk) practices with others' (Wood et al. 1998:234). I reviewed literature from the spectrum of studies attempting to understand youth sexualities in different African contexts. Rather than generalising about the whole continent, I present below examples of findings.

4.1 Dangerous wild sexuality of African youths

'In this new situation, the construction of youth as "the hope of the world" has been replaced by representations of youth as dangerous, criminal, decadent, and given to a sexuality that is unrestrained and threatening for the whole of society' (Diouf 2003:4).

'...it is common to hear women and men alike assert that when a young girl has sex, she loses the vitality of youth and "becomes old" before her time' Scorgie 2002:64).

'The point, for these women, is that their children need to be guided into adulthood, they need to be "looked after", and this entails ensuring that they do not become sexually active before they are "old enough". One could even interpret this viewpoint as a desire to prolong childhood, where sex is the one activity that is unambiguously linked to the status of being an adult – and many parents would like to believe this conceptual connection is also true in practice' (Scorgie 2002:65)

A common rejoinder in the literature is the tension and seeming contradiction of the label 'youth sexualities'. Because sex is often conceived as a rite into adulthood it is also a symbol of the preservation or loss of youth. A conceptual hurdle to overcome is the assumption that youths (particularly unmarried ones) having sex is taboo. While many studies, policies and programmes erroneously conceptualise youth sexuality as an antithesis, others go to the opposite extreme of visualising youth sexual activity as decadent. Available literature confirms that many youths engage in a range of sexual activities with diverse consequences.

4.2 Premarital sex

Premarital sexual activity is high among youths in different African countries (Owolabi et al. 2005:177, Murray et al. 2006, Castle 2003:190, Nzioka 2001, Machel 2001:84, Mturi and Moerane 2001:266, Gueye, Castle, Konate 2001, Delius and Glaser 2002:27, Speizer, Tambashe, Tegang 2001:239, Manzini 2001, Otoide et al. 2001, Mgalla, Schapink and Boerma 1998, Pearce 1999:74, Araoye and Fakeye 1998, Amazigo et al. 1997:30, Oloko and Omoboye 1993, Ankomah 1992). More boys than girls believe that premarital sex is acceptable if pregnancy does not occur (Andrew et al. 2003:123). Traditional mores discourage premarital sexual activity particularly for young women (Ajuwon et al. 2001: 129). Therefore studies report that sexual activity among unmarried women is underreported (Blanc and Way 1998, Manzini 2001:46). However recent times have witnessed marked changes in premarital sexual activity especially in urban areas (Ajuwon et al. 2001:129, Orubuloye et al. 1993, Nichols et al. 1986, Jinadu et al. 1993).

4.3 Virginity

In some societies, virginity¹ of girls at marriage was customarily prized and rewarded (e.g. Castle 2003, Scorgie 2002:64, Kinsman, Nyanzi, Pool 2000). Traditionally a limited form of sexual release for pubescent youths was achieved through non-penetrative intercrural sex or 'thigh sex' (*hlobonga* in Zulu, *ukumetsha* in Xhosa, *ukusoma*) in some communities (Delius and Glaser 2002, Scorgie 2002, Varga 1997). Sexual activity was permitted as long as it did not lead to premarital pregnancy. Adult and elderly women carried out virginity testing to ensure the hymen of unmarried girls was still intact (Scorgie 2002, Hamilton 1998, Maharaj 1999, Leclerc-Madlala 2000, 2001, Delius and Glaser 2002). There is reported revival of this nearly defunct traditional practice, as an intervention to promote female chastity and hence prevent the spread of AIDS. However virginity testing is also challenged based on human rights grounds (Vincent 2006). A few studies report the practice of adult men having sex with virgins to remedy AIDS (Upton 2001:361, Jewkes, Martin and Penn-Kekana 2002, Leclerc-Madlala 2002b, Groce and Trasi 2002).

¹ The local translations of virginity include no prior sexual intercourse, a sustained period of abstinence after being sexually active, rape excludes the girl's intention thus is not deflowering (Scorgie 2002:64).

Teenagers are often married off to much older men who are more sexually experienced (Cook et al. 2003, Clark et al. 2006, Ringheim 2007:246, Mturi and Moerane 2001:264). Teen-brides are expected to conceive within months, and often get pressurised to prove their fertility (Castle 2003:187, Bharadwaj 2002, Pearce 1999). Marriage increases possibilities of conception, thus teenage brides are more likely to conceive before they are adults. It is customary to have substantial age distances between spouses (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:19). Schoolgirls are forced into marriages with older men, thereby terminating their education, mainly due to economic motivation in the form of bride-wealth (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:25). Married youths are less likely to use condoms with their spouse (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1243, Ringheim 2007:246).

4.4 Sexual debut

Sexual debut occurs early among youths (e.g six years - Owolabi et al. 2005:177) - whether boys (e.g. ten years - Nzioka 2001: 108), or girls (e.g. ten years - Manzini 2001:46). It is often unprotected, unguided and uninformed (Manzini 2001:44). It is frequently coercive or involuntary (Brown et al. 2006:273, Scorgie 2002:68, Manzini 2001:46, Rasch et al. 2000:59, Leclerc-Madlala 1997, Varga 1997, 1999, Huygens et al. 1996), particularly for younger individuals, although it can also start willingly, through persuasion, trickery, force or rape. Early sexual debut is less likely to involve contraceptive use (Manzini 2001:44). However youths who begin their sexual lives safely (i.e. with condoms) tend to remain safe (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1245, Shafii et al. 2004). Age at first sex is a primary determinant of fertility (Bongaarts and Potter 1983, Hallett 2007). If it is relatively low, it is associated with prematurely dropping out of school, early marriage and pregnancy and a reduction of prosperity possibilities (Murray et al. 2006, Gupta and Mahy 2003, Blanc 2000). Early sexual debut is associated with higher risk of infection with STIs including HIV/AIDS because of longer potential exposure, and the female reproductive system is not yet mature – physiologically or immunologically, thereby increasing susceptibility (Manzini 2001:44, Kaestle et al. 2005, Zaba et al. 2004, Pettifor et al. 2004, Glynn et al. 2001, Royce 1997, Moss et al. 1991, Duncan et al. 1990). Hallett et al. (2007:5) found that females who began to have sex when they were 12 to 16 were more likely to be infected with HIV than those who began at age 21 or later (see also Manzini 2001). Youths who start sex early are likely to

have more lifetime sexual partners (Owolabi et al. 2005:174, Hallett et al. (2007:5). However they were more likely to use condoms. Once sexual activity begins, it generally continues (Manzini 2001:48). The first sexual partner of schoolgirls is often another student, older non-students in same residence, or Sugar Daddies including teachers (Mgalla, Schapink and Boerma 1998:22). Boys are usually older than their girlfriends (Nzioka 2001:109, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:64, Manzini 2001:46, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:19). Preparation for safe sexual debut may be influenced by sexuality education (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1245).

4.5 Premarital pregnancy

Studies (Meekers et al. 2007:119, Upton 2001:350, Mturi and Moerane 2001, Oppong 1993, Nzioka 2001:108, Manzini 2001:47, Lema et al. 2002, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:63, Garenne et al. 2000) report high rates of adolescent pregnancy. They are often ‘unplanned, unwanted and terminated’ (Murray et al. 2006:53, Mturi and Moerane 2001, Otoide et al. 2001, Rasch et al. 2000:53). However, Manzini (2001:49) found most pregnancies were carried to term although they were unplanned and unwanted. They can cause health hazards especially during labour and delivery to the mother and child, including death (Mayor 2004). They can have dramatic and undesirable consequences (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998).

There are higher rates of pregnancy among early school-drop-outs (Manzini 2001:48). Pregnancy features among the biggest challenges and fears of female students (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:25). Girls are more likely than boys to incur the financial costs of raising a child outside marriage (Manzini 2001:49). While some studies report that adolescents fear premarital pregnancy more than HIV/AIDS (Nyanzi, Pool, Kinsman 2001), others report the reverse –because HIV/AIDS is incurable, yet pregnancy is temporary (Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:66)

Given these problems, why is premarital adolescent pregnancy rising? Childbearing is important to social identity in sub-Saharan Africa (Upton 2001:349, Pearce 1999) and infertility is highly stigmatised. Bearing a child avails means of attachment to social cultural groups (Pearce 1999:75), increase chances of marriageability in some settings, increases social status (Rasch et al. 2000:60, Pearce 1999:75). Motherhood – producing children is a strategy that urban women use to create a sexual

identity of respectability (Davis 2000), to be 'perceived a "responsible person", and perhaps become an ancestor after death' (Pearce 1999:75). Fertility is important to women's identity, sense of personhood, respectability and social status – a rite of womanhood in many cultures (Upton 2001, Castle 2003:187). Using pregnancy, girls can trap boys from wealthy families into marriage or providing for them and the baby (Nzioka 2001:113, Surnam 2001, Rasch et al. 2000:60). Children born into a lineage ensure group immortality and hopefully, prosperity (Pearce 1999:72). Among boys, fathering a child is a sign of sexual prowess, proof of manhood and sense of pride (Nzioka 2001:111). However there was also ambivalence, repentance, and remorsefulness because of the negative results it may have on girls.

Thus premarital pregnancy though not encouraged today, is not condemned in some cultures. For example according to Upton (2001:352), 'One is not stigmatised culturally for bearing children prior to marriage. This level of local acceptance and understanding is, however in direct contrast with the ideologies about reproduction and identity that are often held by policy-oriented observers, where extramarital pregnancies are perceived in a negative light... One reason for this contrast in perceptions about extramarital fertility is that, within Setswana culture, the social value of fertility and reproduction is very high. Infertility is, thus, a much more culturally-significant and salient 'problem'.

In other societies, adolescent premarital pregnancy and childbearing were and still are frowned upon and opposed (Castle 2003:186, Mturi and Moerane 2001:259, Delius and Glaser 2002:31). It could undermine a girl's chances of marriage (Castle 2003:186, Scorgie 2002:63, Calves 2000). Fear of stigma may lead to adolescents deciding to hide the pregnancy and avoid attending antenatal care, thus delaying identification of potential complications.

In some areas, there is a change from ostracisation to general acceptance of premarital pregnancy (Pearce 1999:76). In Lesotho, nowadays, there are many pregnant unmarried girls with several children. Modernisation has diluted the importance of stigmatising culture that ostracised premarital sex and pregnancy (Mturi and Moerane 2001).

Girls are often expelled from school when they become pregnant, yet the boys who are responsible do not face the same punishment (Lall 2007, Dunne, Humphreys, Leach 2006:91, Murray et al. 2006:254, Chilisa 2002, Upton 2001:359, Nzioka 2001:109, Rasch et al. 2001, Koster-Oyekan 1998, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:20, Renne 1996, Gorgen, Maier, Diesfeld 1993). Other girls drop out

of school before the pregnancy becomes public, in order to avoid ridicule (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:25). After giving birth, students often do not resume school due to childcare responsibilities, withdrawal of resources (Manzini 2001:49, Mgalla, Schapink Boerma 1998:25).

Generally, teenage childbearing is high (e.g. Mturi and Moerane 2001:263, Manzini 2001:45, Garenne, Tollman, Kahn 2000, Makiwane 1998).

4.6 Abortion

Clandestine, self-induced, and illegal abortions are common among young people (Grimes et al. 2006, Murray et al. 2006, Nyanzi et al. 2005, Lema, Mpanga, Makanani 2002, Castle 2003:196, Varga 2002, Calves 2002, Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001, Otoide et al. 2001, Rasch et al. 2000, Mutungi et al. 1999, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998, Zabin and Kiragu 1998, Brabin et al. 1995, Meekers 1994, Mpangile, Leshabari, Kihwele 1993, Adewole 1992). Owolabi et al. (2005:176) found a third of secondary schoolgirls admitted pregnancy in the past and 'all the pregnancies were terminated'. Girls resort to illegal and unsafe abortion because of stigmatisation of premarital childbearing (Varga 2002, Mturi and Moerane 2001, Upton 2001:325, Rasch et al. 2000, Varga 1997, Nzioka 2001:109, Manzini 2001:44, Delius and Glaser 2002:31, Koster-Oyekan 1998, Amazigo et al. 1997:28, Renne 1996, Mpangire et al. 1993). Parents, partners and peers may influence or pressure youths to have abortions (Surnam 2001:157, Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001, Gorgen et al. 1998). However, it is a sensitive subject to research (Rasch et al. 2000:52, Upton 2001:352). Abortions are underreported (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:25).

There are various societal values about abortion based on religions, media, biology, ethics, moralism, health, women's rights, culture, etc (Calves 2002, Rasch et al. 2000, Koster-Oyekan 1998). They do not always concur but rather lie along a continuum from murder of the foetus to giving the teenage-mother a new lease on having a life (Surnam 2001:154). Due to negative values (e.g. it is murder, may cause infertility -Pearce 1999) attached to abortion, sexual relationships often end in the long-term as a repercussion. Counsellors must acknowledge their own biases, and put aside their prejudices about young people who are sexually active, seeking sexual and reproductive health services,

or information or needing treatment (Surnam 2001:155). Thus providers will be working the youths' agenda, not the counsellors'.

Provide counselling services for options in the case of unplanned pregnancy including parenting, abortion or adoption (Surnam 2001), referral, and information about the process, services available, consequences, negative effects, etc. Do not give advice, but rather respond to the needs of specific youths (Surnam 2001).

4.7 Contraception

Studies report low uptake of modern contraceptives particularly among youths (Meekers et al. 2007:113, Murray et al. 2006:252, Castle 2003, Lema et al. 2002, Mturi and Moerane 2001, Harrison, Xaba and Kunene 2001, Rasch et al. 2000:59, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998, Amazigo et al. 1997:31). There is great resistance to modern contraceptive-use, amidst high levels of knowledge about different locally available methods² (Upton 2001:350, Rasch et al. 2000:59, Amazigo et al. 1997:31, Agyei, Mukiza, Epema 1994, Adinma and Okeke 1993). Other studies found limited knowledge about modern contraceptives (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:20, Mpangire, Leshabari, Kihwele 1993). Preventing conception is mainly a girl's responsibility (Scorgie 2002:66, Upton 2001, Nzioka 2001:11, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:67, Ahlberg, Jylkas, Krantz 2001). Prevention is more prevalent among older than younger adolescents (Manzini 2001:47, Blanc and Way 1998). It is difficult for youths, particularly students, to access contraceptives (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001, Rasch et al. 2000, Koster-Okeyan 1998, Mpangire, Leshabari, Kihwele 1993, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:20). Indigenous contraceptives are popular and commonly used (Nyanzi et al. 2004, Upton 2001, Amazigo et al. 1997).

There are beliefs that using modern contraception has dangerous side effects, the most feared being infertility (Paz Soldan 2004:282, Castle 2003:188, Upton 2001:356, Otoide et al. 2001, Murray et al. 2006:255, Pearce 1999:74, Manzini 2001:45, Rasch et al. 2000:57, Bledsoe, Banja, Hill 1998,

² For example 'teenagers mentioned commercial products such as liver salts, broad-spectrum antibiotics and a mixture of gin and *akawu* (sodium sesquicarbonate, which is used locally to tenderize breadfruit) as contraceptive methods. Students described the gin mixture as a drink taken after sexual intercourse to "wash everything away". They also mentioned that young women often take liver salts to terminate pregnancy' (Amazigo et al. 1997:31-32).

Makiwane 1998, Adinma and Okeke 1993, Barker and Rich 1992). Others included menstrual disruption, amenorrhea, dysmenorrhea, spotting, breakthrough bleeding, etc. Contraception use was also perceived as a transgression against God's command to multiply (Paz Soldan 2004:280-281). In Muslim societies there are widespread beliefs that Islam forbids contraceptive use (Castle 2003:191, Luck et al. 2000:328). See also Ahlberg, Jyklas and Krantz (2001:26) for opposition from other religions.

Although it is low, the most common contraceptive for first sex is the condom (Manzini 2001:47). It was preferred to hormonal contraceptives feared to potentially disrupt future fertility in the event of marriage (Castle 2003:187, Bledsoe, Banja, Hill 1998, Murray et al. 2006). Some girls would rather not use contraceptives than hinder future fertility (Otoide et al. 2001). Girls avoid discussing condom-use or contraception because of fearing physical abuse, rejection or their partner's objection (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1246, Petersen, Bhana, McKay 2005, Manzini 2001:45, Rasch et al. 2000:57, Varga and Makubalo 1996, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:68). Many others conceal use from their partners (Paz Soldan 2004:282, Castle 2003:188, Luck et al. 2000:333, Castle et al. 1999). There were examples of misinformation such as girls reporting use of the pill and injectable to prevent STIs; a misconception that non-barrier contraceptive methods are effective against infections (Manzini 2001:47).

4.8 Condoms

Youths have high levels of knowledge and awareness about condoms which does not correspond to low use (Upton 2001:360, Hendriksen et al. 2007, Olley and Rotimi 2003, Sunmola et al. 2003, Meekers and Klein 2002, MacPhail and Campbell 2001, Olayinka 1992, Nichols et al. 1986). Boys were reportedly more knowledgeable about condoms (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1241, Simbayi, Chauveau, Shisana 2004, Machel 2001:83) and obtained knowledge from radio, television, magazines (Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:65). Myths about condoms breaking during intercourse, getting stuck in the vagina or making people sick (Upton 2001, Amazigo et al. 1997:32), risky and cause infertility (Upton 2001:360). Uncertainties exist among both girls and boys about efficacy at preventing HIV infection or pregnancy (Andrew et al. 2003:123, Nzioka 2001:114). Embarrassment or shame of being associated with using condoms affected negotiating their use (Nzioka 2001:114, Machel 2001:84, Ahlberg, Jyklas, Krantz

2001:33). Conspiracy theories of the West attempting to depopulate Africa were common (Castle 2003:191).

Sources of condoms were well known, including local health facilities, shops, pubs, friends, youth centres (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1241, Nzioka 2001:114, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:65). Among some adolescents, it was shameful to buy condoms from a person known to them (Nzioka 2001:114). Often obtained from older male friends (Nzioka 2001:114, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:65).

Other studies report that condom use is often incorrect, infrequent and erratic (Murray et al. 2006:252, Owolabi et al. 2005:174, Castle 2003:189, Nzioka 2001:109, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:66, Machel 2001:84, Meekers et al. 2007:114). Low condom use among female students (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:22, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:66). Girls mainly use condoms as contraceptive, not to prevent STIs (Machel 2001:83). Boys use them to prevent STDs more than avoid pregnancy (Amazigo et al. 1997:32).

Condoms are associated with promiscuity and/ or mistrust of partner (Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:64, Machel 2001:84, Ahlberg, Jylkas, Krantz 2001:32), limited comfort (Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:68), an indication of lack of love between partners girl (Amazigo et al. 1997:32), or reduced pleasure (Amazigo et al. 1997:32, Rasch et al. 2000:57). Trust and commitment are associated with decreased condom use (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1246, Jewkes et al. 2002, Mnyika et al. 1997). While free condoms were available to youths in some countries (e.g. Hendriksen et al. 2007), cost was reportedly not a deterrent to others (Meekers, Ahmed, Molatlegi 2001, Amazigo et al. 1997:32). They are mainly perceived as a male method (Castle 2003:196, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:67); decisions about use are controlled by men who can refuse to use them (Rasch et al. 2005:57). Communication between partners, self-efficacy and optimism increase likelihood of using condoms (Hendriksen et al. 2007, Castle 2003:196). Generally, female condoms are not widely available, still unaffordable for most young women.

4.9 Coercive sex

Coercive sex³ is common among youths (Jejeebhoy et al. 2005, Brown et al. 2006, Jewkes et al. 2002, Petersen, Bhana, McKay 2005, Andrews et al. 2003:124, Ajuwon et al. 2001, Wojcicki 2002, Jewkes and Abrahams 2002, Campbell 2000, Susser and Stein 2000, Strebel 1996, Varga 1997, Wood, Maforah, Jewkes 1998, Wood and Jewkes 1997, Varga and Makubalo 1996, Delius and Glaser 2002, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:19, Machel 2001:85, Owolabi et al. 2005:174). However data are lacking and incidents are under-reported (Watts and Zimmerman 2002, Brown 2006:270.). There are various forms of coercion, although most studies focus on rape rather than the scope (Brown et al. 2006:269, Ajuwon et al. 2001:129). Non-consensual sexual experiences include abuse, harassment, someone talking about sex in a discomfiting manner, forcefully brushing their sexual organs against the adolescent, sexually touched without permission, forced to touch one sexually, physical violence when one refuses, forcefully fondling breasts, persuasion using gifts, coercive sexual intercourse, assault, incest, verbal abuse, unwanted kissing, forced exposure to pornographic films, use of drugs for sedation, and traditional charms for seduction, and even insistence on abortion if unwanted pregnancy occurs (Shumba 2001:82, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:23, Andrew et al. 2003:126, Ajuwon et al. 2001:130-131). Younger youths are most vulnerable to coercion (Shumba and Matina 2002, Manzini 2001:49). Victims of sexual violence were more likely to have a poor relationship with parents, poor academic performance, worse mental health scores (Andrew et al. 2003:126).

Perpetrators are usually not strangers to the victim (Brown et al. 2006:227, Ajuwon et al. 2001:131), and often older. Peers play a role either in planning, advising, choosing, facilitating, participating or concealing aspects of the coercive sexual encounter (Ajuwon et al. 2001:131). Men are typically the perpetrators; including boyfriends, neighbours, parents, relatives, teachers (Shumba 2001:82, Odujirin 1993, Ajuwon et al. 2001:131, WHO 1997, Heise et al. 1999, Machel 2001:85, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:22, Zindi and Shumba 1999). Girls can also be violent (Bhana 2005,

³ According to Ajuwon et al. (2001:128) 'Sexual coercion in the act of forcing or attempting to force another individual through violence, threats, verbal insistence, deceit, cultural expectations or economic circumstances to engage in any sexual activity against his or her will. Sexual coercion exists along a continuum which includes unwanted or unasked-for touching, insistence, verbal intimidation, harassment, forced marriage, assault, attempted rape and rape' (see also Heise, Moore, Toubia 1995, Brown et al. 2006:269, Jejeebhoy and Bott 2003).

2008, Shumba 2001). Only a small percentage of coercive sex is regarded taboo among a list of different forms of coercive sex (Brown et al. 2006:278, Ajuwon et al. 2001:130, Jewkes et al. 2001, Wood et al. 1998). Mainly happens in the home, at social events like parties, in school, public places like the road (Ajuwon et al. 2001:131). There are tensions between the school as a site of socialisation and sex education, versus the school as a site of sexual violence (Mirembe and Davis 2001, Dunne, Humphrey, Leach 2006:92, Leach and Humphreys 2007, Niehaus 2000, Shumba 2001, Zindi and Shumba 1999, Shumba and Matina 2002.)

Boys were uncomfortable discussing sexual violence (Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:68). Gender socialisation, gender inequities, economic dependence of females on males and notions of power associated with masculinity or femininity are inextricably linked to sexual violence (Heise 1994:169, Brown et al. 2006:270). Coercion – particularly putting pressure on girls to accept, or beating them – was viewed as a normal aspect of relationships (Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:69). Boys use violence to impose the rules of their sexual relationships and as a mark of masculine power and authority over girls (Wood and Jewkes 1996, Manzini 2001:45, Mager 1998, Delius and Glaser 2002). While girls are often blamed for bringing rape onto themselves (Ajuwon et al. 2001, Nyanzi, Pool, Kinsman 2001, Dunne, Humphreys, Leach 2006:88), a few studies report that the blame lies with the boys (Nzioka 2001:112). Some economic activities predispose girls to rape such as hawkers (Orubuloye et al. 1993). In the few reported cases, punishments of offenders were mostly minor if not non-existent (Brown et al. 2006:270, Dunne, Humphreys, Leach 2006:91, Shumba 2001:82, Zindi and Shumba 1999, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:23, Nyanzi and Nyanzi-Wakholi 2004). Coercive sex often leads to STIs including HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy because neither condoms nor contraceptives are used.

4.10 Transactional sex

Transactional sex is common among youths (Moore, Biddlecome, Zulu 2007, Poulin 2007, Dunkle et al. 2007, Maganja et al. 2007, Wight et al. 2006, Owolabi et al. 2005:175, Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005, Cole 2004, Nyanzi et al. 2004, Kaufman and Stavrou 2004, Luke 2003, Luke and Kurz 2002, Hunter 2002, Wojcicki 2002, Jewkes et al. 2002, Nzioka 2001:109, Ajuwon et al. 2001, Machel 2001:85,

Nyanzi, Pool, Kinsman 2001, Nnko et al. 2001, Macphail and Campbell 2001, Davis 2000, Ankomah 1998, 1999, 1996, Balmer 1997, Meekers and Calves 1997, Dinan 1983, Standing 1992, Caldwell et al. 1989). Boys give money, gifts or favours in exchange for sex. They support the girl and/ or her family (Machel 2001:86). Female dependency is common particularly among the working class (Machel 2001:85), and involves using sex to achieve economic gains (Leclerc-Madlala 2003, Hunter 2002, Davis 2000).

Transactional sex is associated with sexual violence particularly when the girl has spent from the man, he feels entitled to her sexual body and may react violently or even rape her if she denied him access (Wojcicki 2002, Wood and Jewkes 2001).

4.11 Intergenerational sex

Studies (Nkosana and Rosenthal 2007, Kuate-Defo 2004, Rasch et al. 2000:58, Mpangire, Leshabari, Kihwele 1993, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:19, Amazigo et al. 1997:30, Obbo 1995, Barker and Rich 1992, Ogbuagua Charles 1993, Schoepf 1995, Preston-Whyte 1994) report widespread intergenerational sexual liaisons. Intergenerational sex is often transactional; Sugar daddy relationships commonly involve girls giving older men - 'Uncles' (Machel 2001), older businessmen, village-men sexual services in exchange for cash, goods, services such as rent, etc. These relationships are sometimes described as exploitative (Owolabi et al. 2005:174).

Some of the literature is too simplistic in its analysis of these intergenerational sex relationships. For example according to Hallett et al. (2007:1-2), 'an obvious root cause of this behaviour is poverty'. The reality is more complex⁴. The material support encourages female dependency (Hunter 2002). It is a coping strategy for dealing with poverty among working class students (Machel 2001:86), although it was also present among middleclass students. Financial dependency on the adult means the girl cannot negotiate her sexual preferences or even refuse sex, because of her unequal decision-making and assertiveness power (Maganja et al. 2007, Machel 2001:87, Amazigo et al. 1997:31). Girls who have sex with older men are unlikely to insist on using condoms (Hendriksen 2007:1246, Hallett et al. 2007,

⁴ For example Rasch et al. (2000:56) describe the complexity: '... although the majority had an instrumental approach to their partners, they were often also in love with them and had sexual pleasure in the relationship.'

Langen 2005, Gregson et al. 2002, Luke and Kurz 2002, Longfield et al. 2004, Machel 2001:88, Manzini 2001:44, Blanc and Way 1998, Worth 1998, Ankomah et al. 1992).

Girls in these relationships are more vulnerable to HIV infection from their older partners. The Sugar Daddy has relatively longer sexual history and higher chances of being infected with HIV (Manzini 2001:45). The girls are also bridging vectors because many reported concurrent relationships involving a younger partner for companionship or love and a Sugar Daddy for provisions and money (Machel 2001:87, Amazigo et al. 1997:30). Multiple sexual partners before marriage were gendered (Upton 2001:351, Nyanzi, Pool and Kinsman 2001); for girls to maximise gains from transactional sex (Maganja et al. 2007, Davis 2000, Amazigo et al. 1997:30, Rasch et al. 2000:60), acceptable for men (Kaler 2003, Hunter 2005, Ajuwon 2001:129, Nzioka 2001:110, Meekers et al. 1997, Somse, Chapko, Hawkins 1993, Nyanzi et al. 2008,). Multiple partners among students are either concurrent or serial, and often short-term relationships (Owolabi et al. 2005:174, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:22, Nnko and Pool 1997, Amazigo et al. 1997:30).

4.12 Gender and sexuality

Contextual, social and cultural factors shape sexual behaviour (Marston and King 2006, Leclerc-Madlala 2002, Mturi and Moerane 2001). Sexual norms are gendered (Ahlberg, Jylkas, Krantz 2001:33). Patriarchal values predispose female youths to risky sexual behaviour (Machel 2001:88). Gender and sexual power dynamics are inextricably linked to condom non-use (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1241, Jewkes et al. 2001, Dunkle et al. 2004). Adolescent girls tend to be more vulnerable to the physiological risks of unsafe sex than boys, economic pressures such as poverty, age, partner behaviour and cultural expectations (Manzini 2001:44). Due to socialisation processes, male children are more privileged than female ones in a household (Pearce 1999:72).

Double standards exist in sexual relationships (Ajuwon et al. 2001 :129, Scorgie 2002 :67). Young women's freedom is restricted more than men's (Ahlberg, Jylkas, Krantz 2001:33). Girls are more restricted in talking to or going out with the opposite sex, and in the clothes they wear (Andrew et al. 2003:125). Decision-making in relationships, e.g. who initiates sex, is gendered (Marston and King 2006:1582, Varga 1997, Nyanzi, Pool and Kinsman 2001, Varga 2003, Ankomah 1998, Upton

2001:360). Male infertility is rarely an issue, but blame is heaped on women (Pearce 1999:70, 75). Gender norms tolerate sexual coercion of women (Ajuwon et al. 2001:129). For example 'it is considered acceptable for a man to force a woman on whom he has spent a lot of money to have intercourse, or who wears clothes that he perceives to be suggestive or sexy' (Ajuwon et al. 2001:129). Pleasure along with passion is a composite of sexual activity (Undie, Crichton and Zulu 2007). 'Pleasure for men' was a common theme (Ankomah 1998). Sex was reported to be exciting for boys (Nzioka 2001:110) and motivation for sexual relationships among students (Owolabi et al. 2005:177). Boys have multiple partners because it is more enjoyable (Amazigo et al. 1997:31). Boys were interested in information about pleasure and sexuality more than girls (Andrew et al. 2003:123). Love and romance, intimacy, commitment were mainly prerequisites for girls (Machel 2001:83, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001, MacPhail and Campbell 2000, Rasch et al. 2000) but not boys.

Men decide about the initiation and termination of the relationship, the number of children (Pearce 1999:72-73), timing of sexual activity and contraception usage (Nzioka 2001:108, Nzioka 2000, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:69, Manzini 2001:49, Ahlberg, Jylkas, Krantz 2001:33, Blanc and Way 1998). Women's role is passive, submissive, trusting (Ajuwon 2001:134). Girls are obliged to have sex whenever the male sexual partner wants (Machel 2001:85). Many youths believed that condoms should be male-initiated; girls preferred trying to refuse sex than negotiate condom use (Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:63). However, Owolabi et al. (2005:176) found female students generally more assertive than their male counterparts. Multiple sexual partners are tolerated for men (Hunter 2002, Ajuwon 2001:129, Nzioka 2001:109, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:64, Machel 2001: 86, Meekers et al. 2007:116, Scorgie 2002:73) because of the myth that men's sexual drives are uncontrollable (Machel 2001:86). STIs are perceived as good for masculinity (Nzioka 2001, Nyanzi et al. 2004). Gendered understandings of masculinity prohibit protective behaviour (Nzioka 2001:115). Sexual experience was perceived integral to initiation into manhood (Nzioka 2001:110).

Men have more access to IEC and SHE programmes (Meekers et al. 2007:116). Responses to widely available safe sex information are gender differentiated (Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:68). Men and women learn and speak about contraception differently (Paz Soldan 2004:284).

Beyond gender, social economic class affects women's power in sexual relationships (Machel 2001:88). Compared to working class female students, those in the middleclass had fewer sexual partners, used condoms more often, were more willing to challenge gender norms, refuse unwanted sex and more assertive – had an advantage in sexual negotiation. Working class students were more dependent on their partners for material needs, thereby weakening their bargaining power over safe sexual behaviour.

4.13 Communication in sexual relationships

There is difficulty of effective communication among youths with each other in order to resolve differences over having sex, sexual choices and preferences (Manzini 2001:45, Varga 1997, Ajuwon et al. 2001:134, Ahlberg, Jylkas, Krantz 2001:33). Girls initially refuse but later give in to pressure, persistence and tactics, play hard-to-get, and sometimes 'say No for Yes' (Nyanzi, Pool and Kinsman 2001, Harrison, Xaba and Kunene 2001, Varga 2003). It is difficult for young women to assert themselves (Machel 2001:85, Manzini 2001:45, Varga 1997). Inability to negotiate sexual decisions and poor assertiveness skills are prevalent among adolescents (Owolabi et al. 2005:174, Barker and Rich 1992, Amazigo et al. 1997, Delano 1998).

Generally there is low discussion of family planning in relationships (Meekers et al. 2007:116). Adolescents are unable to verbalise their feelings about unplanned pregnancy and cannot make independent decisions about the outcome (Surnam 2001:156). Thus they are easily influenced by others. Articulation and assertiveness in relationships were found to be better among middleclass youth than those from working class (Machel 2001:87).

4.14 Knowledge levels

Knowledge about safe sexual behaviour is high but behaviour change is much lower (Marston and King 2006, Swart-Krueger and Richter 1997, Balmer et al. 1997, Nzioka 2001:115, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:68, Machel 2001:83, Amazigo et al. 1997:32). Knowledge does not translate into practice because although there are high levels of knowledge about sexual risks, fear of HIV and awareness of protective behaviour including condoms, there is also high risk behaviour. A few studies reported knowledge gaps

and a lack of awareness among adolescents of issues related to sexuality, sexual health promoting behaviour and prevention of risky sexual behaviour (Owolabi et al. 2005:174, Singh, Bankole, Woog 2005:329, Andrew et al. 2003:120-123, Ahlberg, Jylkas, Krantz 2001:32, Barker and Rich 1992, Amazigo et al. 1997). Some school-based education programs increased knowledge and resulted into changes in attitudes and sexual behaviour (e.g. Fawole et al. 1999).

4.15 Sources of information about sexuality

Youth report a wide range of sources of information about sexual and reproductive health including songs, posters, drama, radio, television, conferences, promotional materials, brochures, meetings, friends, biology classes (Owolabi et al. 2002:177, Spiezer, Tambashe, Tegang 2001:345, Amazigo et al. 1997:32, Paz Soldan 2001). Mass media (particularly radio) was variously reported as utilised more by men than women (Paz Soldan 2004:283).

A few studies report lack of information about STIs and HIV/AIDS among the problems youths face (Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:25), abundance of misinformation (Rasch et al. 2000:57, Amazigo et al. 1997:32), and recourse to inappropriate sources of information especially among boys (Andrew et al. 2003:127). Pornography plays a role in sexual education (Owolabi et al. 2005:177, Kinsman, Nyanzi, Pool 2001). Older friends are preferred to teachers and parents because they were perceived to be more knowledgeable, less judgemental, and more current (Andrew et al. 2003:123, Nzioka 2001:115).

Mothers are an important source of information for girls (Andrew et al. 2003:123, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:25, Amazigo et al. 1997:32), as well as female teachers and girlfriends in school. But fathers were rarely mentioned by boys or girls, most youths feeling unable to freely talk with their fathers about such sensitive topics (Andrew et al. 2003:125). A few studies (Amazigo et al. 1997:32) do report fathers mentioned as a source of information. Health-workers were consulted for sexual health issues.

4.16 Intergenerational exchange of sexual information

In contemporary society, discussion of sexuality is constrained by relationships of respect between parents and children (Prazak 2001, Delius and Glaser 2002:27): ‘... and awkward inter-generational silence on issues of sexuality’ (Delius and Glaser 2002:30). Difficulties in relationships with parents are common among youths (Andrew et al. 2003:124). Parents do not talk to children about sex in order to preserve the sexual innocence of their children (Scorgie 2002:66). Parents also do not have time for adolescents (Andrew et al. 2003:124). Boys blame girls’ parents for failing to teach basic sex education including information about ‘the safe period’, in case teenage pregnancy occurs (Nzioka 2001:112-3). There are widespread intergenerational clashes in sexual meanings and values. For example while older generations often idealise the goal of sexual activity to be reproduction within a marriage (Prazak 2001), this is not necessarily in agreement with the sexual motivation of youths. Scorgie (2002:68-69) discusses how adults discourage condoms and contraceptives for youths because they believe in virginity until marriage. There are conflicts with parents over culture change in preference for western ideals over traditional values (Andrew et al. 2003:125, Scorgie 2002:69, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001). Intergenerational discussion of sexual topics is difficult and considered inappropriate, shaming (Paz Soldan 2004:278). Young men can boast about their sexual prowess to peers, but feel embarrassed and reticent about discussing sexual issues with adults (Nzioka 2001:115). Youths find difficulty in communicating with parents about unintended pregnancy, and then negotiating their preferred course of action (Surnam 2001:157-158).

Taking a historical perspective to sexuality, Delius and Glaser (2002:30) assert that earlier African societies had high levels of sexual openness including sexual play among children which parents largely ignored, children observing the sexual performance of their parents because they shared rooms, adults discussed sexual matters in the presence of their children, sexual obscenities and technicalities are listed in quarrels. However as Africans adopted Christianity and notions of western respectability, sexual matters became associated with secrecy and shame, making sex a taboo subject of conversation. Traditionally grandparents and peers were and continue to be the main sources of knowledge and information on the subject. In many contemporary settings, however, ‘... for many

families, patterns of urbanisation and migration also disrupted the relationship between city-born children and their grandparents, who might have played a supportive role in sexual guidance' (Delius and Glaser 2002:42).

4.17 Sexuality education

Traditional controls over adolescent sexual behaviour have weakened (Manzini 2001:49, Delius and Glaser 2002). There is a breakdown of traditional forms of sex education particularly with the disappearance of customary initiation rituals (Meekers et al. 2007:113, Delius and Glaser 2002:27, Scorgie 2002:62) and culturally appropriate and institutionalised modes of sexual instruction and socialisation such as the paternal aunt – *ssenga* in Buganda (Davis 2000). Although exposure to sex education delays sexual debut (Manzini 2001:49), lowers teenage pregnancy rates, and STI infection (Magnani et al. 2005, many youths begin sexual activity without receiving sex education (Meekers et al. 2007:113).

Education is not yet fully integrated into the discourse or processes needed to guide adolescent sexuality (Prazak 2001). In school-based AIDS education, knowledge is better retained by middleclass than working class students (Machel 2001:87). Media (Prazak 2001), popular culture and edutainment play significant roles in informing youth sexualities.

4.18 Sexually transmitted infections

There are high rates of STIs among youths (Owolabi et al. 2005:175, Nzioka 2001:108, Machel 2001:83, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:19, Kengeya-Kayondo et al. 1996, Konde-Lule et al. 1997, Brabin et al. 1995, Gorgen, Maier Diesfeld 1993). However many remain undiagnosed for long because of the shame, secrecy and stigma attached to catching an STI (Nzioka 2001:109). Ignorance about STIs means that many youths are unaware of being infected particularly of asymptomatic ones. STIs increase chances of catching HIV. Catching an STI was acceptable as a way of gaining experience – a perception tied to dominant views of masculinity (Nzioka 2001:113, Nyanzi et al. 2004). Common sexual health problems among youths include menstrual pain, discharge from the genitals (Andrew et al. 2003:125).

Masturbation was a topic often discussed by boys (Andrew et al. 2003:123) who frequently wanted to know about its side effects including infertility, insanity, as well as societal values towards it.

There is low uptake of HIV voluntary counselling and testing among youths due to fear of rejection and stigma (Meekers et al. 2007:114, Hendriksen et al. 2007:1246). Consequently, many youths are unaware of their HIV status. However studies report high levels of HIV infection among youths (Manzini 2001:45, Varga 1997, 1999, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:63, Meekers et al. 2007:113). Teenage HIV/AIDS levels are higher among females (Hendriksen et al. 2007:1243).

Although there are high levels of HIV awareness, there is limited or no behaviour change (Nzioka 2001:109, Nzioka 1996). Most male youths do not consider themselves at risk (Ahlberg, Jylkas, Krantz 2001:33, Nzioka 2001:110, Harrison, Xaba, Kunene 2001:66). Some behaviour change reported including condom use, restriction to one partner, reduction in partners – as a result of fearing HIV/AIDS (Nzioka 2001).

Some studies still report denial of HIV/AIDS. For example: ‘...many Batswana men spoke of AIDS as being a “radio disease”, as something one hears about on the radio but that no one actually dies from’ (Upton 2001:361).

4.19 The ambivalence and diversity of same-sex relations

Studies of homosexual behaviour in young people are rare (Marston and King 2006:1584). The public discourse asserts that homosexuality is un-African, a foreign disease that was introduced by white settlers, and is now spread principally by foreign tourists and ambassadors (Epprecht 1998, Pincheon 2000, Murray and Roscoe 1998). Using excavatory tools of contradiction, denial and reversal, Pincheon (2000) analyses theoretical claims about the absence of same-sex customs in sub-Saharan Africa prior to contact with outsiders; and writes them off as historical fallacies. Focusing on the Zimbabwean case study, Epprecht (1998) analyses the ways in which indigenous homosexualities were discourses into invisibility by specific cultural and historical practices. Literature about the South African mines argues that men-men sex often involved ‘thigh sex’ and not sodomy or anal sex, was between senior men and junior youths, and not fixed in construct because the boy-wives could become husbands with age and maturity (e.g. Delius and Glaser 2002).

4.20 Youth-friendly services

Trusting that private information will remain private is essential to the honesty and accuracy with which adolescents discuss their sex lives with their providers (Ringheim 2007:247).

There is a need for (improved) youth-friendly services (Campbell and Foulis 2002). Youths do not seek information or treatment due to fear, ignorance, shyness or inexperience (Barker and Rich 1992, Amazigo et al. 1997, Owolabi et al. 2005:174). Available services are often not conducive for use by youths because they lack privacy – visual and/or audio, have limited confidentiality, long waiting times, limited consultation times, are inaccessible, distant, prioritise parental involvement, or dispensed in a harsh and judgemental manner (Bearinger et al. 2007, Erulkar, Onoka, Phiri 2005, Ford et al. 1997, Jones and Boonstra 2004, Ford 2001, Speizer et al. 2000, Rasch et al. 2000, Mmari and Magnani 2000, Nare, Katz, Tolley 1997, Kim et al. 1997). The services alienate youths (Ringheim 2007:247) if for example private information about HIV-infection is disclosed to a spouse, partners, family members or employers (Maman et al. 2001). This may lead to stigma, ostracisation, partner violence (Ringheim 2007:249). Youths may resort to unskilled or non-professional providers including traditional healers whose services are confidential (Coplan et al. 2002). It is important to establish non-judgmental youth-friendly services (Tylee et al. 2007, Owolabi et al. 2005:178, Hendriksen et al. 2007:1246) and reformulate youth-friendly policies (Ringheim 2007). Privacy and confidentiality may necessitate protecting information about youths' sexuality, sexual and reproductive health from parents, guardians or teachers (Ringheim 2007, Jones and Boonstra 2004). Service-providers must be trained and reoriented to guard this human right as a matter of professional ethics (Haslegrave and Olatunbosun 2003). Confidential record keeping systems must be developed and maintained (Ringheim 2007:250). Services must be free or subsidized so that they are affordable, such that youths do not need to depend on others to access these services.



Chapter 5: Youth sexualities – the colours of a chameleon

'The disquieting association between the youth population and the AIDS pandemic necessitates a value-free exploration of the sexual world in which young people operate, with the aim of understanding their world-view prior to the introduction of any necessary interventions' (Undie, Crichton and Zulu 2007:221).

'Future studies of the African and sexuality should avail themselves of research and analytical tools which allow for the multiplicity and fluidity of both categories. Thus the widest possible frame of inquiry is necessary when examining the categories of race, gender, sexuality, and discourses of the African' (Pincheon 2000:56).

Library research revealed a paucity of qualitative research-based literature about sexuality and sexual behaviour of youths in The Gambia. Due to the prominent presence of the MRC Laboratories, the bulk of relevant literature focuses on sexual and reproductive health (for example Miles et al. 2001, Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2006, Paine et al. 2002, Madhavan and Bledsoe 2001, Shaw et al. 2001, Shaw and Jawo 2000, Kane et al. 1993, 1990, Stewart 1993, Skramstad 1990a). Most available studies basically employed epidemiological approaches to their investigations of sexual behaviour, mainly utilising large quantitative survey data (for example Ratcliffe et al. 2001, Shaw et al. 2001, Bledsoe et al. 1998, Ratcliffe 2002, Pickering et al. 1992, 1993a, 1993b). Available ethnographic readings mostly date back to more than twenty years ago, specifically the work conducted by notable colonial anthropologists¹. A handful of recent ethnographies (Ebron 2002, Schroeder 1999, Bledsoe 2002) merely hinted at sexuality and related themes. I found some related literature – mainly programme evaluation reports for both local and multi-national organisations (Paine et al. 2002, GAMCOTRAP 2003, Shaw and Jawo 2000). These tend to narrowly focus on analysing programme achievements in relation to set objectives, are based on research that lacks rigour, and seek to impress would-be funders to provide for subsequent project cycles. Therefore, it was important to employ in-depth ethnographic methods to contribute towards filling this gap in literature, further complement and up-

¹ Reference is made here to the various periodic annotated bibliographies of Professor Gamble.

date existing literature, particularly because sexuality and sexual health are culture-bound and context-specific phenomena, without fixed boundaries. My work is perhaps the only contemporary ethnographic study of youth sexualities in The Gambia.

This chapter discusses key components of youth sexualities that emerged in the data.

5.1 Unpacking virginity

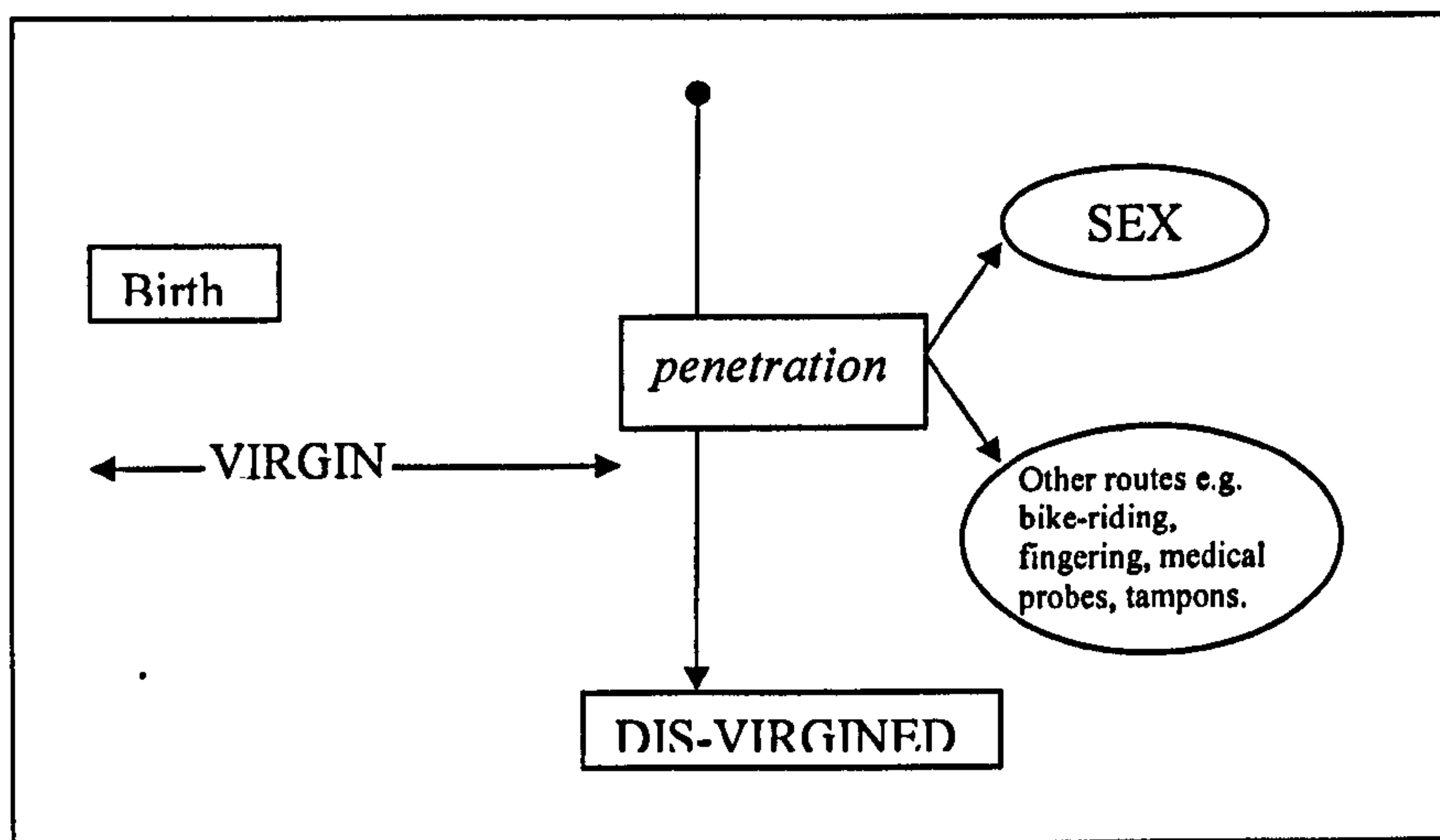
Youth can be a period of transition from childhood and its innocence to adulthood and its consequences². In Uganda Nyanzi et al. (2001) reported ambivalence surrounding virginity which was often positively associated with purity and innocence, but also rawness, greenness, and backwardness. The lay interpretations associated with this concept are situated within deeper social constructions of self, personhood, maturity and coming of age, ritual transition, social relationship, interpersonal interactions, codes and norms of respectability and propriety, belonging, health, beauty and sexual attractiveness. In this study, local perceptions of virginity were deeply nuanced and shaped along the contextual divides of age, gender, educational background, marital status, and locus. Discussions rich with debates about virginity, chastity and abstinence revealed local variations in meaning-making systems. They also generated a range of interpretations which were sometimes contradictory. Virginity was both good and bad, depending on the context.

5.1.1 What is virginity, anyway?

Participants mostly agreed that one was born a virgin and remained so until one engaged in penetrative sexual intercourse. Therefore virginity was for those who were not sexually active, as well as those whose erotic behaviour excluded penetrative sexual intercourse. Therefore participation in activities associated with foreplay including kissing, holding hands, smooching, hugging, caressing, embracing, etc did not exclude one from the sexual category of virgins.

² Theorisations which associate childhood with purity and innocence are challenged by realities of children involved in criminal activities, or child soldiers who engage with weapons, child prostitution, or even vigilant groups that recruit minors.

Figure 5.1 Unpacking virginity and 'dis-virgining'



In this lay perspective, heterosexuality was the normative stance from which participants spoke^{3,4}. By default discussions were about a penis penetrating a vagina. Shocked responses at our probes about other forms of sexual activity such as anal or oral sex, confirmed widespread 'hetero-normativity'. 'By Allah, that is *haram*!' was a common retort by both male and female study participants. Both oral and anal sex were described in terms of uncleanness, pollution and sin⁵.

5.1.2 The gendered meanings of virginity

These youths' conceptualisations of virginity were highly gendered. Girls and boys reported that while a girl remained a virgin until she was penetrated through the vaginal canal, a boy was labelled a virgin as long as **only** his penis had not penetrated a vagina. It did not make a difference if it was medical probes that were inserted into the girl's vagina, or if fingers were pushed in for example

³ During the analysis of the data, I reflected on my approach to asking about this concept and realised that perhaps it could have been better. Why is it that I had missed the opportunity to go beyond the box of investigating meanings of virginity as situated within heterosexuality? How had I allowed my critical academic sensors to slide into the normative mode and adopt the local stance that was generally blind to anything but heterosexuality? Was the heterosexual in me that much greater than the scholar? Which voices had I silenced by tagging along and unconsciously closing my eyes to the possibility of other sexualities speaking about virginity among my study participants? Can one run away from oneself in the midst of research? Was it too late to rectify the situation? These thoughts ran through my mind as I later typed up the initial analysis of codes and nodes relating to virginity.

⁴ My salvation was the realisation that plenty of information had emerged from the study participants about their experiences with, perceptions about, and knowledge of homosexuality, even though I had not consciously set out to investigate it.

⁵ Refer to chapter 7 where I discuss the role of Islam in the sexual processes of these youths.

while douching. According to these youths all vaginal penetration (even in non-sexual contexts) excluded a girl from being a virgin.

On other hand, if a boy utilised his fingers or other apparatuses to penetrate a girl during sex, he was still deemed a virgin. Definitions of male virginity were phallocentric. They were restricted to what the penis did or did not do. If each of all the other body parts on a boy were inserted at some point into a vagina, but with the exclusion of the penis, then that boy was still a virgin. However, irrespective of context, as long as a girl's vagina was penetrated, she was no longer a virgin. Thus I had two different girls explaining to me with regret.

Yilitenda: You see I lost my virginity when I was unmarried. I went to the doctor and he had to check me down there. But when I told my boyfriend he did not believe that I had never been with another man before him. **(17-year-old student)**

Famatou: It is not good for young girls to ride a bicycle because if they are cycling roughly on a road with large pot holes, the seat of that bicycle can very easily dis-virgin them so that when the husband gets to meet with her in future times, he will find no blockage there meaning that her door was broken into by someone else before him. It is not good for the marriage if the man did not know her to be married before. Those bicycles can be bad for girls. But modern girls just ride bicycles because they see men doing it. **(16-year-old rural)**

Narratives revealed that virginity in a girl at the time of marriage was a source of respect for her from the husband.

If you are not a virgin, that will not help you because when your husband finds you a virgin, both of you will be happy and he will respect you.

...if the man was not the one who *dis-virgined* her, he will not respect her.

(Jericho Wollof girls FGD)

In contrast however, girls' virginity was presented as a potential source of shame in casual sex relationships because it could denote low sex appeal.

Many rural girls reported that virginity was important for marital happiness and harmony because a man would have respect and trust for a wife he '*dis-virgined*'. This expression was used in

ordinary English conversations as well as formal discussions. It works as a verb which refers to the act of penetrating the hymen of a virgin – thus dis-virgin-ing her. It was significant that most of the participants we asked automatically associated virginity with femininity. Thus while it was commonplace to discuss whether some girls were still virgins, discussants and interviewees variously struggled with accepting that virginity also applied to boys and men. Male virginity was not easily conceivable. To them – girls and women were the virgins. It was the boys' role, duty, responsibility and destiny to dis-virgin the girls. And not vice versa.

'What are you talking about?' their repeated silences when asked about male virginity, seemed to shout back at me.

However after explanation and probing, some study participants were able to begin conceptualising the notion and relaying to me how they understood it.

5.1.3 Virginity is about respectability

Beyond the couple, many participants claimed that it was important for the in-laws on both sides to receive a report of virginity if the girl was not previously married. However, unlike other societies in which a virgin fetched higher material rewards of bride-price such as a kid-goat among the Baganda, more livestock among the Masai, etc, among these Gambian youths there were generally no reports of socially-set tangible rewards for virginity at marriage. The only exception in the data was a report of gifts of maize (see below) in one rural village of predominantly Wollof ethnicity. When considering the almost non-existent rewards for virginity in the study areas, one possible explanation is the common practice of remarriage of women, such that several brides are often previously married (and may even have children) elsewhere.

Int: Why did you say that there are many virgins here? Is it that all the girls from Jericho Wollof – their husbands find them to be a virgin?

Resp: There are some who were virgins and we know it. For us who are from here, if anybody got married and the husband finds you to be a virgin, you will get your share. Because here when your husband finds you to be a virgin, they will give you rice and maize. And if you are not, you will not get that. That's how they know that you were a virgin or not.

5.1.4 Spatial connotations of virginity

While urban-based focus group discussions had strong currents contesting the widespread existence of virgins once teenage commenced, in some rural areas the girls claimed that they all waited for marriage to become sexually active. Apparently meanings of virginity were differentiated in relation to space and location. Generally from the narratives it was evident that rural virgins were the norm, while urban virgins were denigrated unless their circumstances were special - for example *Ibadu* girls who wore veils and garments covering everything apart from slits for their eyes. This construction of virginity resonated with stereotypes of the urban space as a locus of dangerous sexuality, connoting over-indulgence in so-called high-risk sexual activities, *vis a vis* the rural areas as a place of safe sex⁶. This simplistic polarisation is examined in Philips et al.'s (2000) edited volume on constructions of sex in the margins; away from the metropolis.

Fatima: Virgins are very rare in urban areas here because girls nowadays start having sex when they are kids. They are very hyper.

Francis: We can never tell because we don't know whether they still have their stuff intact.

Juma: Maybe what you say is true, but I know some good girls who are still virgins and yet they grew up in Kombos, not the provinces. But their family is a strong Muslim one with no nonsense. These girls wear *hijab*. From school they go to their compound. They only go to the mosque for prayers on Friday. (LAHS⁷ FGD)

⁶ Literature review reveals urban-rural disparities in constructions of sexuality in Africa. According to Delius and Glaser (2002:36), 'Traditionalists viewed urban areas as dens of iniquity and epicentres of oppression ... - a wilderness - bereft of proper values and behaviour'. Historically, 'black urbanisation was an overwhelmingly male experience' (Delius and Glaser 2002:40). Women who migrated to towns were either wives and mothers in Christian homes, or 'widowed or abandoned single women who made the journey to find husbands or start afresh in town'. Many of the latter turned to domestic beer brewing and prostitution in order to survive. Thus the reputation of city women. Urban women who are usually referred to as 'Town women' are morally suspect, promiscuous, uncontrollable (Davis 2000, Delius and Glaser 2002:40). Urban schoolgirls are more sexually active than rural students (Murray et al. 2006:260, Mgalla, Schapink, Boerma 1998:22). There are stereotypes of urban women being HIV/AIDS carriers more than their rural counterparts (Davis 2000). 'Fast city living' is believed to have a negative impact on women's fertility in Nigeria (Pearce 1999:74). Changes are reported in urban premarital sex (Ajuwon et al. 2001). There are more SRH youth interventions and services in urban areas (Murray et al. 2006:266, Castle 2003:186, Speizer, Tambashe, Tegang 2001:345, Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001, Rasch et al. 2000, Nare, Katz, Toelley 1997). Urban-based students are more likely to resume their studies after giving birth (Manzini 2001:48). Rural youths are less likely to understand the timing of conception, and less likely to use contraceptives (Amazigo et al. 1997:32).

⁷ Abbreviation for 'Lend A Hand Society'.

Observation highlighted it was important to transcend stereotypes of sexuality and place. Using the strategy of theoretical sampling, I obtained counter-evidence disrupting such overly simplistic bipolar juxtaposition: rural youths are virgins, urban youths are sexually active. What about urban virgins? What about rural youths who participated in high-risk sexual activity? What about mobile youths who regularly commuted between rural and urban spaces? I applied these critical questions in problematising data on virginity, enabling the analysis to move beyond essentialising based on spatial categories.

5.1.5 Virginity and religion

In narratives about virginity, the role of Islamic religion in relation to family background and access to mobility was alluded to. Many participants – both youths and adults – often took for granted their assumption that the more devout a youth was, the less tendency for them to engage in sexual activity at an early age, premarital or extra-marital sexual relations⁸. They even applied this to their beliefs about who had less temptation to have casual sex partners; ‘...definitely the fornicators and adulterers are not schooled in the ways of the *hadith*.’⁹

5.1.6 Some myths about virginity

Myths about being able to tell who among them was a virgin and who was not, abounded particularly among the girls. Some claimed that they could tell who was a virgin ‘by judging from the way one walked’, ‘drooping breasts indicated sexual activity’, ‘a newly *dis-virgined* woman has a bad body odour mostly coming from between her legs’, etc. For others, particularly those in the more remote rural hamlets, they reported more credibly that since they did everything together – walking, working, leisure, and travel, they therefore knew each other well.

Int: Are there many virgins in your area?

Jatou: There are many virgins. And if there are some who are not, we don’t know it.

Int: How will you know that there are many girls who are virgins? How would you know?

⁸ Studies (e.g. Lagarde et al. 1996) from neighbouring Senegal indicate that Islam played a significant role in influencing sexual behaviour, and thereby curbing the HIV/AIDS levels in that country.

⁹ See chapter 6 where I discuss the role of Islam in shaping youth identities and sexualities in The Gambia.

Fanta: We see it in them. And we know it because we all move together. And we don't hide anything from each other. If you are, we know it. If you are not, we know it. (**Jericho Wollof FGD girls**)

There was a widely believed myth that a virgin always bled profusely from the first sexual penetration of her hymen. Both boys and girls reported this was one sure way to confirm virginity.

Int: How will they know that you are a virgin?

Ndei: Something will come out of you. That is how they will know.

Paula: There will be plenty of blood because when he dis-virgins you, he has to break through your cover. It is like tearing here [*she pulled upon her ear-lobe*].

5.1.7 The virginity double standards

Diverse sexual double standards are systematically institutionalised and upheld as normative practice in many settings (Crawford and Popp 2003, Milhausen and Herold 1999, Haavio-Mannila and Kontula 2003, Greene and Faulkner 2005, Marks and Fraley 2005, Jackson and Cram 2003, Gentry 1998). In my study, it was masculine propriety for youths to be known to be sexually active, and for feminine propriety it was important they appeared controlled sexually – played out as staying virgins until they were married, being chaste, abstaining from sexual activity, fidelity, and having only one sexual partner at a time¹⁰.

Int: What do you think about virginity?

Omar: Virginity is very important for the girl. It will make your husband give you a lot of respect, and you'll be respected by everybody in society. Also when you're not a virgin, they'll say like, 'When you were small or when you were a kid you used to have sex. You are a *halak*. You are a slut.' They give you all sorts of names. And you'll never be respected. And you'll be a disgrace to your family.

Abdul: And then somebody will also see virginity as something foolish. It means that a girl is not too intelligent or she's dumb. (**FGD Kombos male**)

¹⁰ See Jassey and Nyanzi (2007) for a reflection on how to be a proper woman in the time of AIDS.

Manneh: It was not easy for me to learn about doing sex because I could not tell my friends that I did not know what to do. When we used to hang out in the voos while chatting in the evenings about our girls, it was tough teasing for a boy to say that you had never played sex with a girl. So I also told them that I had done many girls. I told them because if not, they would have teased me and even maybe stopped to respect me, that how can a big boy with these beards who is buying meat for *Afra* and sugar for *attaya* not know sexing. They tease you and laugh, deh! (26-year-old Kotu male)

5.2 Initiation of sexual relationships

Understanding the dynamics of negotiations of sexual relationships among youths is critical to unpacking the power and gender dynamics that prevail in local enactments of sexuality. There are conflicting voices about the gendered politics of initiating, establishing or refusing sexual relationships¹¹. Thus it was crucial that I examined the different routes and processes through which sexual relationships were initiated among the youths I studied.

Int: So how do youths these days choose their spouses?

Boy: Boys follow girls.

Boy: What I know, when you love her, you follow her and explain your problems to her. If she loves you, you start your relation there. (NYSS¹² mixed FGD)

Jainaba: Some girls also follow their boyfriends. You will see a girl buying something and then going there so that the boy will know that the girl loves him so much. (NYSS girls FGD)

Int: For a girl to start a relationship with a boy, do you think it's acceptable?

Many voices: No.

Lamin: It is not right.

Int: Why not?

¹¹ For example in Wood et al.'s (1998) paper on forced sex among youths in South Africa, they present the contradiction between literature from Nigeria that asserts that women can (and do have the power to) negotiate when to have sex including refusing, and from Uganda where claims were made that women are powerless to make decisions about any aspect of their sexual lives.

¹² Abbreviation for 'National Youth Services Scheme'.

Jatou: Because girls don't marry men. A man marries a girl. Boys should go and start. (NYSS mixed FGD)

5.2.1 Who initiates sexual relationships?

Relayed to me in English discussions as 'he is following me for love,' or 'I am chasing that girl for love', the process of initiating sex was as varied as the individuals and their circumstances were. With the exception of arranged marriages in which initiating the sexual relationship was largely influenced by individuals other than the sexual partners, the dynamics of negotiating the beginning of a sexual relationship were highly fluid among these Gambian youths. Not only did context influence the characteristics of the process, but individual personalities and qualities, largely contributed to how events unfolded. Whether asking individuals about their personal experiences, or groups to describe contextual conventions, direct questions¹³ often unpacked a can of worms. They produced ambivalent answers, intermingled, often contradicting each other, and over-laden with deep contextual nuances that needed unpacking.

Abou: In the past men mostly confronted women for love or marriage but now, it is the girls who first express/ show interest to the man. Then the man would approach her.

Yassin: It is all the same. In this recent generation, when a man meets a woman, he shows her a sign which makes her bold to respond out her mind to you.

Ebrima: What is said is true that they both express love for one another. A boy cannot just explain himself to a woman like that, he sees it in the girl before approaching her. (FGD Yallal Males)

There were different views about which gender initiated sexual relationships. While some participants reported that it was now more common for girls to suggest a sexual relation to men, the predominant narrative claimed that this gender role was a man's prerogative according to religion, nature, and

¹³ Examples of such direct questions include 'who initiates a sexual relationship', 'where do youths often start their sexual relationships?', 'how do people begin talking about having a sexual relationship with each other?', and 'what do they do in the initial stages of their sexual relationships?'

culture. It is worth noting that this question presupposed that the individuals in the sexual partnership had autonomy to choose and decide whom they could relate with.

Magib: That is very common nowadays. It is almost understood by everybody. In the past men mostly confronted women for love or marriage but now, it is the girls who first express or show interest to the man then the man would approach her.

Juma: Men first approach women. He first expresses love and just a meeting point or a place where they disclose love to each other.

Magib: I can say that both express or show interest to the other because you can only love a person who shows interest in you.

[...interrupted by the interviewer...]

Int: From whom does the love first start?

Magib: ... it starts from the woman.

Mendy: In most instances the boys first confront the women about love.

Resp: That is the fact since the beginning of Muhammed – peace be upon him, it was existing like this. That is men being first to approach women.

(FGD Yallal Tankonjala Male)

5.2.2 'Girls do chase boys!'

There was also ample evidence in the data to suggest that there were some girls who did initiate sexual relationships.

Int: Is it acceptable in our society for a girl to approach a boy for dating or marriage in this present generation? Does it happen in Yallal here?

Momodou: We accept that it happens. Girls approach men.

Kabir: Yes, girls do approach boys. Girls chase boys. It happens when they meet and the girl invites the boy and when you visit her, she would express her interest to you. And then the boy would promise to reply to her in a few days' time which he does after accepting her. They begin until with the help of God they become married. **(Yallal Tankonjala Males FGD)**

Khamada: It is definitely happening. I cannot lie to you that we have not heard of it. But then I am saying that such a one is a *Sheytani*¹⁴. It is a woman with many problems who comes to the man to say I have some feelings for you. She is too hot and me I don't support it at all.
(32-year-old man)

Wulimata: But then if the boys can come and follow you for months asking you for love because they want you to be the lover, why not also the girls? We have a mouth like the boys and we can also see a boy who makes you want to be his girl friend by his good looks, smart dressing and good character.

Aminata: They will say you are a *chagga*¹⁵. That one is just a *chagga*.

Lamin: Do you mean to say that a *chagga* is the one to ask her customers? No, no, no! It is the men who go to the *chagga* and say they have money. How much for a pussy. [Laughter]
We see them every day at Senegambia. The man first comes in his car to the place where the *chagga* is standing on the road and then the *chagga* knows what he wants. **(LAHS FGD mixed)**

Going against the dominant discourse about the code of behaviour relating to who initiates sexual relationships among these Gambian youths was a subaltern discourse that revealed contemporary girls were also developing a repertoire of strategies to start or express their sexual interest in a member of the opposite sex without prior indication on his part that he was interested. The vast majority of study participants agreed that this was a reversal of gender roles. Many people also reported that it was 'modern' – meaning not traditional. They claimed that while such a move from a girl would not have been tolerated in the (imagined?) past, it was becoming more acceptable especially among the educated urban classes. Some narratives from the school-going youths associated this new trend among girls and women with evidence of increased westernization – '...copying the ways of the *Toubabs* that we see in the movies and on TV programmes like Esmeralda'. In a focus group discussion with youth policy makers, some discussants blamed it on initiatives geared towards women

¹⁴ Arabic for Satan, the devil.

¹⁵ Wolof for commercial sex worker.

empowerment as designed in the West. Some girls were actually able to question why society prescribed that they wait for their male counterparts to initiate the sexual relationships.

Angel: These days we can read and write. Instead of waiting for a boy to talk first, you can write him a letter saying you love him. The problem is if he does not love you he can give this letter to bad people who will be laughing and shouting on you all the time, or even to report you to the teachers. **(FGD Tallinding)**

Malick: There is a girl who was texting my phone for love. She is the one who started me.
(23-year-old male Kotu)

There was some discussion about the role of literacy, and new communication modalities facilitated by developments in information technology such as mobile phones and the internet. Girls who were able to access education and/or information technology were also more likely to appropriate these enhancers and communicate their sexual interest without necessarily facing the targeted male. Letters, phone calls, sms text messages and emails were urbanised phenomena that were evidently transforming contemporary processes of communication even within sexual processes.

Generally there were deep undertones of disapproval of female youths initiating sexual relationships. Many arguments laced with the sarcasm of patriarchy claimed that it was not proper for a girl to tell a boy that she was sexually interested in him, particularly in the platonic stages of their acquaintance. Why was it improper? Perhaps because it was a silent threat to the overruling male supremacy; an indication of the potential for patriarchy to crumble. 'Who is the man in such an affair?' was an underlying incredulity in the data collected especially from male youths who totally refused to concede that this was socially acceptable. However this stance was not exclusively from male youths because some of the female study participants such as elders in the rural areas also argued in the same vein.

Furthermore this reversal of gender roles distorted the socially established interpretation of sexual order as practised in Islam by many study participants. They claimed that a true Muslim woman could not out-step her place by wanting to 'do the things of man as if she did not believe that

when Allah willed, a man would approach her' for either beginning a romantic relationship, or marriage. As expressed by Khamada above, it was supposedly a female under evil influences from *Sheytani* who could initiate sexual interactions with a man. In the mind of many other study participants, it was women perceived to be wayward - as encapsulated by the *chagga* whom some claimed to initiate sexual relationships. Rather than embracing such allegations at face value, this appropriation of the *chagga* icon was more symbolic than real. The *chagga* was a local metaphor that stood for the wayward, corrupted, impure, or disorderly versions of femininity in the study area. In fact as pointed out by some youths located in the spaces where commercial sex work thrives, most *chaggas* did not approach their clients for sex. Rather, the clients made the first move to indicate sexual interest in the CSWs.

5.2.3 The involvement of others

Data from formal interviews focussed on the role of the two people involved in the sexual relationship. They were largely silent about other people – outsiders to the relationship, getting involved in initiating the sexual relationship. However from participant observation, I witnessed, observed, and even participated in cases of outsiders getting involved in starting sexual relationships with some of the youths. Some of these cases were subtle hints dropped by 'well-meaning' relatives or friends when an older youth was assumedly procrastinating in commencing sexual activity.

'You are too fussy! Stop picking and choosing, picking and choosing. There is no perfect man. So get someone... anyone and go! You are growing too old,' my good friend Haddy was often lectured by her family members. A cause of stress on her part, Haddy's experiences with her family – which she often narrated in distress to my research team - earned her the nickname 'Pick'n'choose' in our circles.

Some other cases were coercive; abrogating the individual's will and right to choose the specificities of his or her sexual life. At one level, this was played out as peer pressure. Youths who succumbed to the demands of peer pressure were often driven by the need to fit in with their friends and peers, thereby conforming to these external expectations which were not always necessarily what the individuals wanted. Another form of coercion that I repeatedly witnessed was arranged marriage

where youths gave in to requirements of commencement of sexual activity in order to meet their reproductive obligations to, and by the arrangement of their kin group.

Mediation also played a role in sexual relationships. A common feature of youths' sexual behaviour (Nyanzi et al. 2001, Wood et al. 1998), mediation mainly involved acquaintances chosen from the same age-group. The youths reported that in most cases, it was important that the middleman was well known to – in fact a close friend of - the recipient of attention. In other words if a girl was initiating the relationship, she identified a middleman who was well known to and preferably a close friend of the boy she was targeting, and vice versa. Family members mostly played this role, followed by close friends. A distinction that appeared in some data was that in the initiation of sexual relationships hoped to lead to marriage, a family member was the best type of middleman. This mediation was believed to forge stronger links of confidence, trust and friendship with the new family of marriage. But for casual sexual relationships, associates who were well known to, but not related or close to the targeted individual, were a better choice as middlemen because, while it was important that they convinced the intended partner to accept, one did not want to 'land others in trouble after the relationship was terminated'. Interestingly there were many instances of sending children (even as young as five years old) to relay and convey messages of love, set up clandestine appointments, carry gifts from one lover to another among these youths. The explanation for this was that the innocence implied by childhood meant that nosy adults, and suspicious observers could be kept in the dark about the sexual interest and activities of the youths. This was important particularly in contexts where the youths were not allowed, expected or obliged to be sexually active.

5.2.4 Hinting

For many rural girls, rather than explicitly state their attraction to and sexual interest in a potential male partner, they reported that they instead used manoeuvres to entice, tantalise and drive them into realising their sexual intentions so that the men would then pick up the cue and initiate verbal communication. In such cases, acting out their interest in socially codified movements and gestures rather than verbally articulating it, was a measure of self-preservation particularly in cases where the girl was not sure that the sexual attraction was mutual.

Khaddie: You also make dramatic actions when moving so as to make the boy crazy about you. When he sees you, he would tell his colleagues how much he loves you. 'I love that girl because her actions are catching me.' If you, the girl, happen to overhear that, you keep making all sorts of dramatic movements to make the boy more crazy about you.

Int: Why don't the girls, with all their actions tell their love to the boy and free yourself?

Jainaba: Some tell their love to the boy and do come to him every time to show their love.

Amie: There are some boys when you tell them your love, they reveal it out to their friends when they are sitting down, chatting. And he tells his colleagues that he does not love you even though you love him. So this is why we girls don't tell out love out to the boys. **(Yallal girls FGD)**

The process of initiating a sexual relationship was not a straightforward predictable path. Rather the study participants' descriptions of their experiences revealed that it was fragile, unpredictable, and with several unseen obstacles. One had to proceed with caution, deciphering a number of often unspoken hints, props and pointers from the recipient of the attention. One improper action or gesture or word could offset previous progress, dissuade the potential partner or even negate the possibilities of any future sexual relationship. Behaving erotically either too early or too late could also affect the partner's response. Future interaction depended largely on the partner's response to previous actions, words or gestures. Each of the actors in the two-some were busy; engaged in a process of dropping hints, decoding those of their partners, responding to their interpreted meanings, taking cues from previous moves, dropping some more hints in an ever revolving process – until mutual agreement was reached. At each stage, the couple's intentions were either diverging or converging – progressively leading to the blossoming of a sexual relation or the dashing of any hopes of such an interaction within the present circumstances.

These pointers towards another's potential sexual interest included a particular look – '...giving her a bedroom look...', '...dimming the eyes as you talk...', '...using the eyes at a slanted angle as if you don't want to look...', '...the look of love...', '...looking with some feeling...' - a smile, a gesture, giving gifts, attention, seeking them out at a public gathering, verbally-expressed liking, etc. Gender-specific ones for girls included swaying the hips from side to side while walking in

the presence of the man, rolling the eyes, gyrating the buttocks when dancing with him, exposing body parts that are normally covered such as the thighs, revealing the lower back adorned with waist beads, etc. For the boys these erotic hints included buying special gifts, taking the girl out for entertainment, sending her love songs, requesting tam-tam drummers to play her a special number, or simply giving her money. The actors used a mixture of cues from within the available social sexual milieu, or otherwise innovatively created their own idiosyncratic erotic signifiers.

5.3 Progression of sexual relationships

In order to understand the dynamics of sexual debut, I collected accounts of how sexual relationships progressed. The analytical question was: How does a relationship become sexual?

5.3.1 From platonic to sexual

Proximity was a factor discussed in cases where youths chose their partners.

Sy: We had been friends for a long time. We went to the same high school. We lived on the same street. So when he asked me to be his girl, I agreed because it was finished. All the time together we spent was enough to make me love him. IDI

Mariama: You see, they will sit together and the boy will have feeling for you. That's how they start. (NYSS mixed FGD)

Many girls reported it was possible to have a relationship with a member of the opposite sex, without having sex.

If you love me, you will not have sex with me until we marry. (NYSS girl)

I say, you can have relationship without having sex. It is just like friendship. (NYSS FGD)

However, several other girls and boys contested the plausibility of a long affair remaining platonic particularly where the two individuals had feelings for each other. In addition, they reported that the longer a relationship lasted, the more likely that it would become sexual.

Lamin: When they have stayed for too long. When it has been long when they are together, the boy may say, 'We have stayed for long. Let us do what brought us together.'

Int: How long is too long? What period is too long? And what do you mean by what brought us together.

Lamin: Many boys or many men have their girl lovers so that they can have sex. There may be a time, I mean, when the boy may ask the girl to have sex. **(LAHS group 2, mixed FGD)**

During a focus group discussion conducted among very pious youths who respected Islam, the male youths claimed to prefer platonic relationships until marriage. Sexual activity was reserved for only those in contexts of marriage. A common refrain in their individual interviews was: 'Sometimes they never get sexual. If the girl is a virgin, you can't touch her. It is forbidden in Islam.'

The length of time spent in relationships was categorically mentioned in discussions about when relationships turned sexual. However, some participants stressed that in relation to determining this time, was the intention of either partner. If one was merely interested in sex and not friendship, relationship, or marriage, then they quickly worked towards meeting their goal – often abandoning the partner thereafter. The union was about one partner using the other to gratify their sexual needs. Many discussions revealed it was often the men who 'followed' a girl only for sex and then terminated the relationship after achieving their sexual satisfaction. Participants further reported that likewise, a girl's value, her revealed self-control, and her ability to set boundaries determined how far a boy would stretch the progress and content of the relationship, including determining how soon it became sexual.

Int: After how long does a boy ask a girl to have sex?

Alexia: It only depends on the girl's hyperness and maybe if the boy realises that the girl is very cheap. So he asks the girl out and later, you know he starts doing some small stuff – a little romance. Then after, maybe the girl will be so excited that she will have sex. But it only depends on how far she allows him to go. **(LAHS group 2)**

Dagga: There is no fixed time. We can say that there is no fixed time with love before one will go to have sex. Some boys don't even love girls. But they only follow them in order to have sex with them. So as soon as they get that girl, the first thing that they go into is sex.

(LAHS Group 2)

Generally, participants tended to agree that it was not possible to have sex the first time they met, unless the girl was a *chagga* – a prostitute selling sex to strangers. Instead they claimed that relationships took a while to become sexual because it was important for ‘a boy to convince a girl by fooling the girl until she accepts’.

A few storylines from urban youths revealed that their relationships first took on physical connotations without necessarily becoming sexual. In the process of becoming sexually active, they dilly-dallied in physical explorations of each other’s bodies prior to actually having sexual intercourse. Such physical acts were often erotic and gradually built up towards the ultimate stage of sexual intercourse

Fac: When does a relationship become sexual? When do they start having sex?

Nyima: It normally happens when the girl is hyper or the boy is horny. That is maybe when his dick stands up and when he’s over excited. You know sometimes they won’t be able to control their feelings. Also the guy gets horny when he sees the girl’s private parts. Maybe the breasts or the vagina and stuff.

Fac: What do you mean by ‘a boy gets horny’? What does a horny boy look like?

Nyima: Like he has sexual feelings.

Farida: He has the feelings and he won’t be able to control his thing. So it will be moving. It will be jerking and it starts removing sperms... [*laughter*].

Fac: When does this happen?

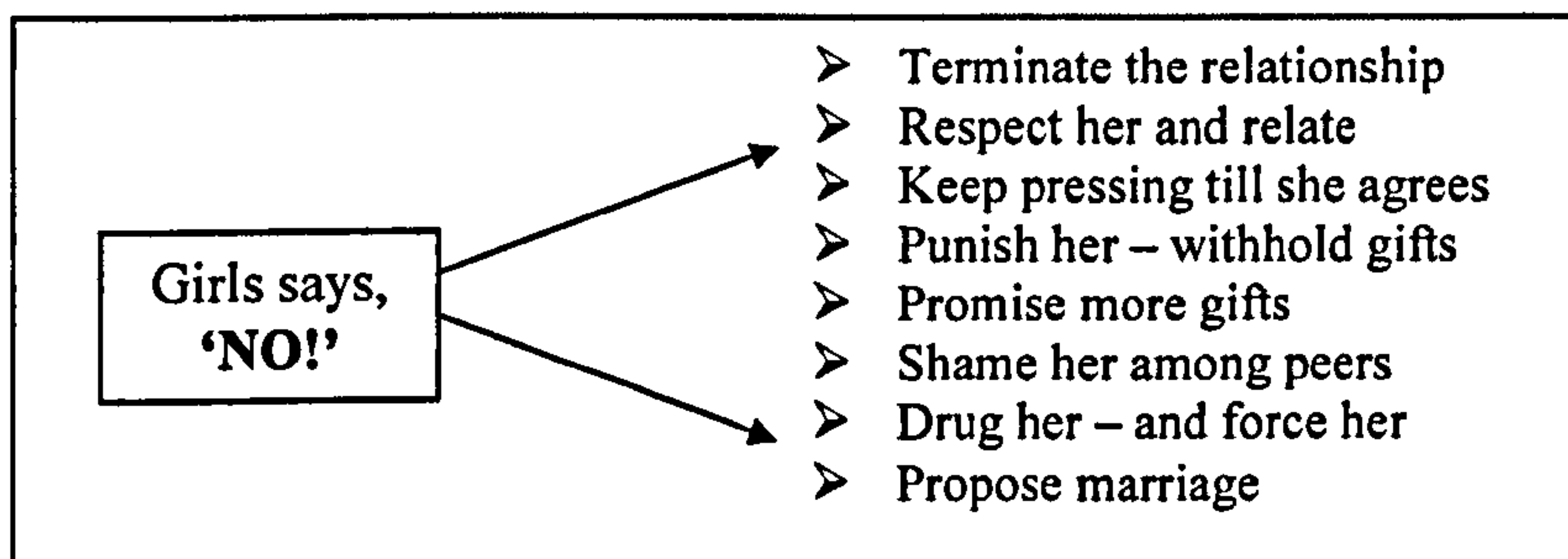
Nyima: It could be when they are kissing and stuff. (LAHS FGD)

5.3.2 Power to pace the relationship

Youths believed that girls had power to resist the sexual advances of guys. The issue was that while some of the girls used this to their advantage, several others were not aware and were instead often taken advantage of by sexually-charged boyfriends. Some youths reported that girls had the power to determine whether or not they engaged in sexual intercourse or other sexual activities, and the frequency through self-control, and open communication. Albeit stating the potential and agency of female youths to make decisions about their sexual partnerships, many participants were also aware

that a lot depended on the boyfriend's reaction to the girl's stand. While some guys accepted and respected boundaries set by their girlfriends and lovers, several others violated them. Ploys men used to persuade girls included trickery, peer pressure, threats to abandon the relationship, demands to prove their love, withholding gifts or services, and force.

Figure 5.2 male responses to a girl refusing sex



Hawah: The boy may say to you, 'The only way that you can show me that you love me is by having sex.' If the girl doesn't agree, it brings problems.

Aisha: Like me, one day my boyfriend said to me that he wants sex. I told him after school he can marry me and then we have sex. He told me that, 'If you do not do it, I will get another girlfriend who will do it for me. Go home now. I will go to look for my new girl.' I told him that if he truly loves me he will not do this.

Nenneh: And also if you refuse he can go around spreading stories about you that you are a foolish girl who does not know how to keep your man happy. **(Rural FGD females)**

5.3.3 Kkikiriki – drugging attaya to have sex

In discussions about different routes to achieving sexual intimacy with a girl who was hard to get, different participants mentioned a strategy that some men and boys resorted to. *Kkikiriki* – a local expression that refers to a widely gossiped about practice of intentionally drugging a drink before giving it to an unsuspecting girl, and then having sex with her. Participants reported the sedative was so potent that the girl would neither offer resistance nor have any recollections afterwards, unless

reminded. During my fieldwork, rumours about and caution against exposing oneself to the dangers of *kkikiriki* abounded in conversations of people in towns and villages, and in the local press.

Narratives of the dangers of *kkikiriki* were often couched with warnings about venturing into geographical spaces that facilitated high-risk sex, or mingling with individuals of particular youth sub-cultures stereotypically associated with high-risk sexual activities. Such youths included disc jockeys, drug takers, nightclub dancers, CSW, alcohol consumers, etc. *Kkikiriki* was mainly associated with urban pleasure spots and forms of entertainment. It was also a common theme of stories that warned unmarried female youths against going out at night in the company of strangers or the wrong company. The high prevalence of these stories revealed the underlying psyche of a community wont to protect its powerless females from the potential for cunning, deceit, and sexual violation resulting from men's desire. The narratives perpetuated the sexual script of female youths as victims and men as powerful calculating sexual predators.

'If he can't get you through persuasion and negotiation, he'll drug you to his bed,' they reiterated. 'No matter what you do to refuse him sex, he'll still trick you.'

Due to the shame and stigma surrounding the experience of *kkikiriki*, I was not able to get anyone to admit that they had gone through it. All that I gathered was anecdotal evidence. Was this an example of a local Gambian urban myth? If so, what functions did it serve? Who was perpetuating it? And why was it repeatedly spread and transmitted so rapidly? Where didn't it circulate?¹⁶ As I reflected upon the meaning of this storyline, I realised that the metaphor of *kkikiriki* provided a medium for communicating about, talking through, and handling the overly sensitive topic of rape, unsolicited sex, sexual violence and violations that could happen to youths. It created a space where the sexual terrain was tackled at a localised level, among individuals, small groups and through public discourse.

¹⁶ These questions beg to be explored. They will form the crux of my future research in the post-doctoral phase.

5.4 Justifications for sexual relationships

These youths gave two main justifications for starting sexual relations, namely a) marriage as a basis for maturity, pleasure, and reproduction, b) sex per se.

5.4.1 'Marriage on my mind!'

There were varying accounts of how sexual relationships developed. Some participants mostly in the more tightly and close-knit rural societies reported that during the initial stages of courtship the aim of the relationship was openly and explicitly stated as eventual marriage. In some cases, it was even as early as the first time when a love relationship was mentioned by either partner. This did not imply that the need for marriage was the overriding motivator for sexual relationships among these youths. Rather it perhaps meant that these young people either consciously or unconsciously tapped into the only socially legitimated and acceptable reason for two unmarried individuals becoming physically close or getting emotionally involved with each other. Sexual activity prior to marital union was highly stigmatised, mainly along Islamic lines. Many rural and some urban youths variously reported that it was bad, wrong, sinful, shameful, polluting, spoilt to get sexually involved with a person to whom one was not married. Premarital sexual activity was mainly perceived and presented as a pollutant that revealed corrupted mores, lack of restraint, poor parental guidance, lack of spiritual Islamic understanding, uncontrolled sexual desire, etc.

One of my free-lance assistants said, 'For us, the only thing worse than premarital sexual activity is getting an illegitimate child.'

'Why is it so bad?' I asked.

'It is terrible because it is the only solid proof that you are fucking around before marriage.'

He spoke from experience because not only did he have a child with a girl whom he never married, he also had had sexual relationships with three other Gambian girls, and an array of holiday sexual partnerships with youthful foreigners. He stressed that even though it was highly stigmatised and shameful, premarital sexual activity was also common, tempting and pleasurable.

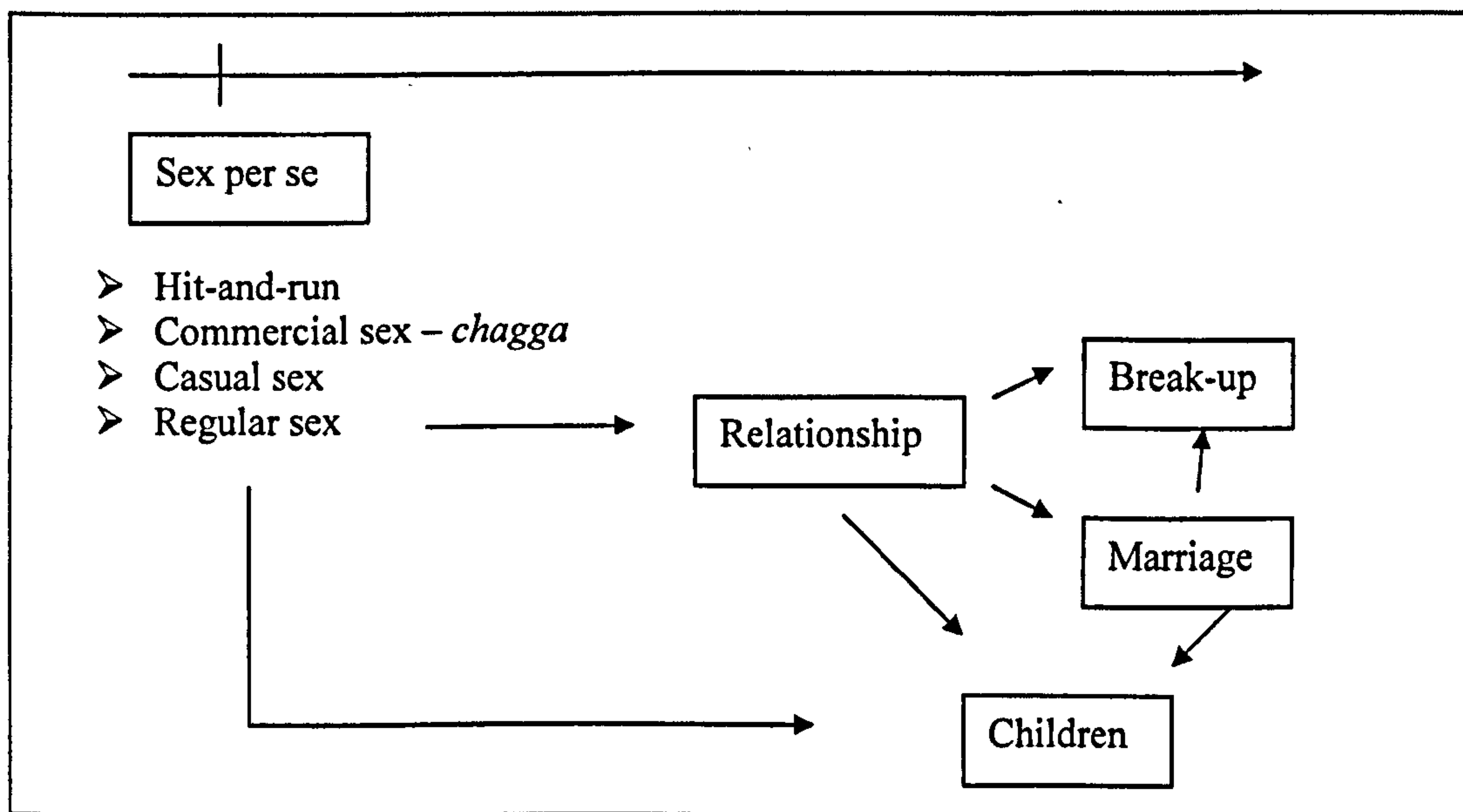
It was in the same vein of discussing premarital sexual activity, that the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and even the very existence of HIV was blamed on 'degeneration of values, and loss of Islamic faith

in this present generation'. Popular reasoning tampered with covert piety assumed that if people were more godly and lived according to the admonishing of Allah laid out in Islam, they would live highly moral lives and have clean sex only with their marital spouses, thus eliminating the possibilities of a sexually transmitted virus¹⁷.

5.4.2 Sex for sex

In other narratives, sex per se was the underlying driving force for initiating sexual relationships. This was particularly the case among study participants who discussed their involvement either as clients or providers of commercial sex work, as well as those who had one-time sex affairs (also called hit-and run) either with a visitor in the neighbourhood, or as they were away from home, or with people they only met that once at a programme, etc.

Figure 5.3 Possible progressions from sex as initial point



¹⁷ See also chapter 6 on Islam, and 7 on local perceptions of HIV/AIDS.

5.5 Further progression of sexual relationships of youths

In mapping the sexual terrain of these youths, I explored the activities they engaged in within their sexual relationships, where they conducted them, when, why and how.

5.5.1 What do they do?

The data contained a wide range of activities that were labelled sexual. Many of these were mentioned when we asked the participants, ‘What do people in a sexual relationship do? How do they spend their time together?’

Sheriff: They do a lot of kissing and touching and so on. [*laughter*]

Fac: Someone else?

Tamsir: Umm, different types of kissing like French kissing. [*Laughter*]

Fac: What is French kissing?

Tamsir: It is the introduction... the introduction with the female mouth...

Others: Haaii! [*Giggles*]

Tamsir: ... yes, the female mouth. The female lips entering the male lips so that they can make some feelings out of it.

Lamin: This is the act of kissing in which their lips open up and their tongues enjoy each other.

Fac: You said there is French kissing. What other types of kissing do you know?

Aisha: Mmm, I don't know the name. But there is another type. It is like the guy does not only kiss the mouth but goes down to the breasts as well. [*Laughter*]

Sheriff: And there is eating the private the parts. [*Screams and laughter*]

Fac: Which private parts? The breasts? Which ones?

Sheriff: The vagina.

Tamsir: And there is another one they call 'Blow John'¹⁸. That is when the girl sucks the guy's thing.

Ebou: Yes. He sucks it right.

Fac: So, what other things apart from kissing do youths in The Gambia do in their relationships?

Jaliba: They have sex and go around to parties or they go out for outings or stay in rooms and do something.

Rashid: Sharing feelings like the male touching the female's breasts and vagina and many things. They may have sex if the female is over-excited.

Fac: What if the female is not over-excited. So they only have sex when the female is over-excited?

Resp: No. Sometimes the male may cause her. **(LAHS mixed FGD)**

Actually I am not speaking from experience but from what I hear when talking with my friends. Most of these things do happen in a friendship or relationship. And sometimes there is something which is called fingering which is where the man takes his hands and rubs them on the girl's private parts. **(Kotu male FGD)**

Kebba: Those female youths from the bushes don't do the proper things of kissing and rubbing each other to get some feelings. She just lies in her bed on her back with her wrapper tied around her breasts. The man comes and unties the wrapper. He plays with her *binbins*¹⁹, counting them around her waist. Then he enters her for sex. Then they finish and they for bath to clean out the *nagis* from their private parts. Then they sleep. It is not nice.

Mam: Maybe she will burn some *churai gongo* or *churai tedde* to give the man appetite for sexing.

Abdou: Hah, but the Fulas have *nyefal tedde*- it is very strong. The man will just remain in the house until he gives her what she needs. **(Tallinding FGD male)**

¹⁸ This is probably derived from 'blow job'.

¹⁹ Wollof for waist-beads.

The list of activities that these youths reported in their sexual relationships was endless, including dancing, clubbing, watching dirty movies, sitting and chatting, making *attaya* and enjoying it together, walking in the evenings, supporting each other, visiting each other, walking hand in hand, playing cards, rubbing each other, eating together, cooking for him a good meal, giving a special gift, sending cards, texting a message of love on the mobile phone, phone calls, exchanging love letters, spending money on her, sending love song dedications or greetings on the radio, giving her attention, going to 'the programme'²⁰ together, spending some time together, kissing and touching – French kissing, “blow john”, fingering, sex, revealing and touching erogenous body parts, sitting on laps, sit together in locked spaces, making feelings, etc. Many youths distinguished between the activities of sexual relationships in urban areas from those in rural areas. However my participant observation revealed there was a big overlap between activities done in the two spatial divides. The lack of access to electricity in some rural study areas meant that the youths there spent more time on natural leisure than on activities that needed electrical operation of gadgets such as videos, internet, mobile telephones, radios, or even disco-dancing. Instead they engaged in evening walks, dancing at programmes where *tam-tams*, handclaps and singing provided live music, cooking and eating together, etc.

5.5.2 Sexual paraphernalia and sensuality

I found the youths in my study widely knowledgeable and open about local sexual paraphernalia, aphrodisiacs and symbolic actions connoting sexual desire. It was relatively easy to generate discussions about sexual symbols even in mixed-sex group discussions. Having extensive knowledge about objects, substances and actions linked to sexuality and sensuality was not equated to increased sexual activity. It was more or less common knowledge floating around even for the consumption of pre-pubescent children who were assumedly asexual.

²⁰ The local name for any social gathering often for merriment or celebration often involving music, dance, dressing up and feasting – see section 5.5.3.3 for detailed discussion.

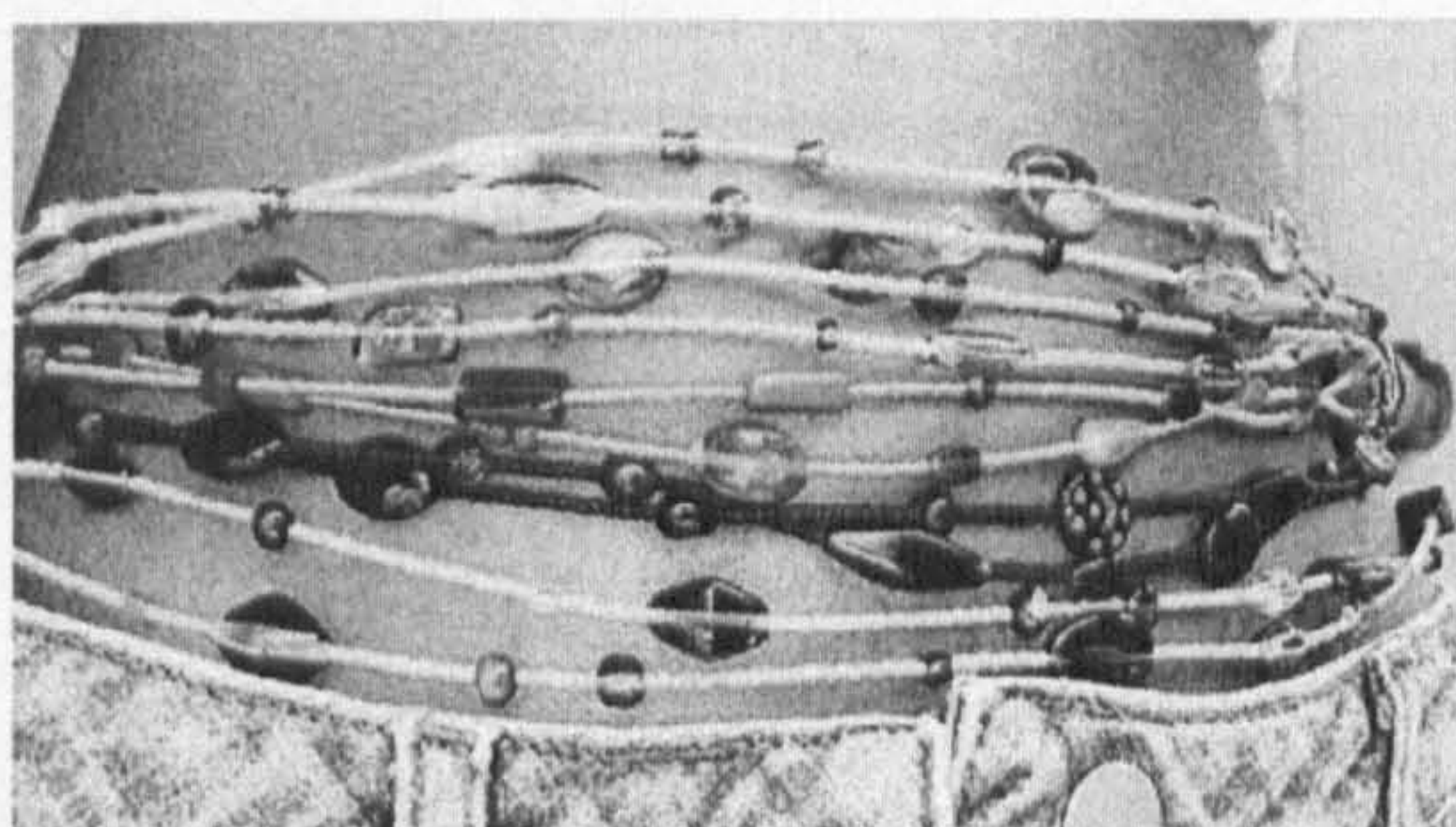
5.5.2.1 *Bin-bins*: the sexy string of waist-beads

Figure 5.4 Showing off binbins



Bin-bins – also called *jaliwali* in Fula, were the most frequently discussed sexual objects in the data. Beads of different colours, textures, sizes and shapes were strung together using stretchable or elastic materials, and worn around waistlines of female youths. Sometimes a single line of beads encircled the waist.

Figure 5.5 More binbins



Often it was several rows of different types of *bin-bins*, going round and round from the waistline downwards towards the hips. Normally worn under clothes, participants reported that *bin-bins* were supposed to be seen only by one's sexual partner. However, because I had variously seen these (often) brightly-coloured little bits sticking out above panty-lines of some females especially in urban spaces such as The Kombos, Banjul, Farafenni town centre and on the coastal beaches of Kotu, Senegambia and Bakau, I often asked about this contradiction. There were differing views about showing *bin-bins* in public.

Nuruyat: For children, it is okay to buy them *binbins* to put on so that the child's body can grow with a formed waist. The *binbins* guide how her shape is formed. So that is why many

parents buy for their young daughters of one year, two years, three years or even up to five years *binbins*. **(KII Bakau)**

Yaya: Some people put inside some medicine to help the girl. The medicine is something protection against the evil tongue when people see her very beautiful and they talk on her and she can get sick even up to the point to dying. So you buy that *binbin* and you take to the *marabout* to put on it some *jujus* and make some prayers of protection for the girl. She will wear it until she grows up. **(KII Berending)**

Kinne: The *binbin* for woman is to put her husband in the mood for action.

Interviewer: How action?

Kinne: In the evening when she is walking near him, she shakes her big bottom and the *binbin* makes the noise kujong-kujong-kujong. [laughter]. And then he thinks mmmmmmmmmmm sex! **(19-year-old rural)**

Buba: If she wants to put him in the mood she can bring his hand to her waist and make him to rub on the *binbin* and then think on sexual things.

Mariama: Or just to lift her shirt little like this and he sees the *binbins* when some *churai nemli* is burning. He will know what she wants at night and he will give it to her. **(Girls FGD Tallinding Kujang)**

Yankuba: When they are in their bed about to have sex together, the man can talk to the woman when he is fingering the *binbins*. This gives her very strong feelings which makes her ready for him. Then they have sex. **(22-year-old urban)**

Apparently *binbins* served multiple purposes in the local sexual terrain. They signified sexual interest from the girlfriend to the boyfriend. Thus when a lady wanted to communicate her need for sexual interaction with her partner, she appropriated his local knowledge and interpretations of *binbins*, and consequently exposed to him her sexy waist-beads. *Binbins* also ignited and enhanced sexual feeling between sexual partners - acting as items of foreplay to be stroked, manipulated, licked, sucked on, pulled, twisted, etc by the male partner, and on the female's body.

When a platonic relationship was becoming sexual, a female youth could ask her male friend to buy her *binbins* – signalling her potential to become sexually involved with him. This was because one did not ask for *binbins* from someone with whom they did not have sexual dealings. Alternatively (and more commonly), a male partner donated *binbins* to a girl he had sexual interest in. If she accepted, it was indication the sexual attraction was mutual. Thus if people in a platonic relationship exchanged *binbins*, it was a symbolic code denoting phasing into the sexual terrain.

During the period of my relationship with Ousman Bah leading to our marriage, his sister took me to the market and bought me some luminous *binbins*. ‘Go and ask Ousman what they are for. Ask him to teach you how to use them,’ she instructed as she handed them to me. At the time, it had no meaning for me. I took the *binbins*, showed them to Ousman and merely elicited a strange little laugh from him. It was only much later that I learnt that when there were matchmakers in a family, they would instigate a relationship by donating *binbins* and asking the recipient to ask the intended partner to teach her how to use them. ‘It is a way of the sisters helping a man to start something with a girl if he is afraid of approaching her face to face. The sisters do it for him,’ an elderly Fula²¹ woman explained to me.

In data from *bumsters* on the beaches, *binbins* were discussed as part of the costume of CSWs that signified to potential customers that the woman who was exposing her *binbins* offered sexual services at a fee. The data seemed to suggest that in some urban spaces which necessitated a strict dress code, CSWs conformed to the high standards of apparel but used *binbins* as a symbol of the sex work industry.

Ebou: *Chaggas*! They are intelligent 100%. One way of knowing who is a *chagga* when you go to those types of expensive hotels, you look at the waist and you see the *binbins*. You see a very smart beautiful woman wearing good dress and high shoes with make-ups on her lips and eyes. She is wearing smart, maybe taking a drink at the bar counter like a tourist. You may think she is a paying visitor. But when you see her showing her *binbins*, you walk to her

²¹ Fula Laobe are renowned for their sensuality and they specialise in the selling of a range of sexual paraphernalia.

and ask her how much she is selling her pussy for the night. She will tell you. It is their sign for advertising the job. (FGD Kotu male)

Contrary to normative associations of *binbins* with sexual paraphernalia, I also observed a new trend in feminine fashion among urban youths. Young girls sometimes donned hipsters. Britney Spears, Beyonce, Celine Dione and Madonna were frequently cited exemplars whose sense of dress and fashion influenced these youths to the point of attempting to look and dress like them. I often spotted the beads on *binbins* along with the top cut of G-string underwear sneaking out of a low-cut pair of trousers when I was in the urban and coastal areas. When I inquired about this boldness of displaying the assumedly private sexual items, different key informants and youths assured me that I was witnessing a new trend in fashion, rather than seeing the display of sexual symbols.

In the rural areas, it was definitely taboo for a female youth or adult to expose her *binbins* in public especially beyond the confines of her home, and in the presence of males or strangers. Some youths even reported that it was shameful for adult women above the reproductive ages to be known to wear *binbins*.

Kekuta: But these days our women have become shameless. You can see a woman old enough to be your mother. She is walking in the market with her bucket for buying fish. You hear the *jalijali* going kroochu kroochu kroochu. That is how far bad society has become.

5.5.2.2 *Churai nemli*: the incense of desire

Locally called *churai*, incense was a popular component of local erotic material purchased mainly by women and burnt to arouse men. It often included a base such as *gowe* seeds, crushed and mixed with powdered scents for perfuming the bedroom, ashes from scriptural writings about fertility, and occasionally insecticides to drive away mosquitoes or other insects. The varieties were common knowledge. The power of *churai* was proclaimed in popular music. Participants mentioned many brand names such as *churai gongo*, *churai nemli*, and *nyenfala tedde* – a particularly potent one translated as ‘you’d better go to sleep’ and renowned for reducing men to begging the partner for sexual fulfilment. Both the *churai* and incense-burner were readily available from Fula Laobe traders in public markets. People believed in it, judging from the queues to purchase from specific sellers.

5.5.2.3 Ah ‘*becho*,’ my sexy netted petticoats!

Netted petticoats called *becho* were part of young women’s negligee. With large patterned holes in lacy or thin material, *becho* were worn to entice one’s sexual partner. Usually worn beneath long skirts, they never got exposed to the public. The only exception was at programmes when women jumped high and writhed their bodies in dance. They also flung high the outer garments and stylishly exposed their *becho*, as a sign of their sexuality and prowess in matters of sex.

5.5.2.4 Bitter kola – giver of male strength

Many people believed that chewing bitter kola heightened the sexual strength of boys and men. It was believed to be an aphrodisiac, enabling a sustained erection, and reducing premature ejaculation.

Other commonly mentioned local aphrodisiacs included hot fresh tiny chillies, cashew nuts, barracuda head, cow hoof. Although the majority of participants in the study refrained from drinking alcohol because it was forbidden in Islam, many mentioned that alcohol was very dis-inhibiting – causing one to lose their strictness about abstaining from sex and instead caused people to look for sexual partners, especially if alcohol was consumed away from homes.

5.5.3 Where do they have sex?

Since many youth study participants were unmarried, I asked explored sex and place.

5.5.3.1 Sex and place

Many participants reported it was common practice to link up with a boy who had his own room away from his parents’ house, give him a payment of cash or in kind or offer a service, and lodge in his space for sexual activities. In most cases the owner of room made himself scarce while the two sexual partners occupied it. I observed that the ‘compound’ structure in the rural provinces facilitated the segregation and separation of older sons from the main household living structures²². When a son matured, he was allowed to erect his own mud hut within the enclosure but away from his parents’ huts. For example Borom Bah was still single when I was living in his father’s compound, but he had his own hut where I sometimes shifted my sleeping-mat when important visitors spent the night in

²² See for example my fieldwork father – Pateh Bah’s compound below.

Pateh Bah's compound. I also participated in the building processes of some of the huts of my male youth participants in the rural study areas.

Many people believed that it was both disrespectful and a definite source of bad luck if unmarried youths had sex in the same place that their parents had sex.

Pa Ceesay: The man can become very sick and die from it. If not, then maybe his business will all collapse because he disrespected his parents by sleeping with his lover in the same room that his father uses. The woman may fail to get pregnant in her affairs with that man. If not, she gets pregnant but then the babies always die before they are born. Her pregnancies come out. So it is better to be safe by finding another place to take your woman to. (KII

Samba Soto)

Among the wealthier classes in the urban study setting, I observed that the older unmarried sons often shifted to the 'boys' quarters (also called the 'servants' quarters) – an outer wing of their family's main house. Usually much smaller in size, these structures often comprised a row of sleeping rooms and a toilet/ bathroom at the back of the main house. While some families rented these rooms out to paying tenants, many others allocated them to the adult sons.

It was in these spaces that many youths reportedly had sex. What was striking was the masculine gender role of leaving the onus upon the male youths to organise a place where to take the girlfriend in order to engage in sexual activities. This gender role followed from the normative expectation that the male youths played the leading role in sexual relationships; they initiated the sexual interactions, organised the venues, etc.

Urban-based youths also referred to the possibilities of renting a hotel room, paying lodging fees, going to a nightclub and having sex in a dark corner as people were dancing (see Nyanzi et al. 2005 for a discussion about negotiations of sex on the dance floor), having sex on the beach, inside the back of a parked car, etc. The nature of urbanity provided more spaces for sexual interactions. *Bumsters* often mentioned the beaches, tourist resort areas, or the rooms of the female tourists. This was one of the few cases in which the prerogative was upon the female sexual partners to organise the venue for sex. Often older, wealthier, and foreign, the sexual partners of these *bumsters* were usually targeted for material rewards, financial benefits, or abilities to arrange for travel back to the woman's

country of origin, (for details see Nyanzi et al. 2005, Brown 1992, Wagner 1981, 1977, Wagner and Yamba 1986).

Students mainly located their sexual practices around their school activities. For school-going youths, the school environment provided connection, friendships, exposure, and spaces for building sexual relationships. Many students were sexually involved with other students either in their schools or neighbouring ones. School toilets, empty classrooms, deserted sports fields, etc were frequently mentioned as venues for early sexual activities of many students. For some girls, the annual school picnic that marked the end of junior school was the setting for their first sexual experience; they often discussed how they 'gave away their innocence or virginity' to the boy who had been the centre of their attraction during the whole school season. For others, it was during the Parents' Day when family members attended a concert presented by the students, towards the end of each academic year. A few others mentioned having started their early sexual activities while their school had gone for inter-school sports competitions at the National Stadium. From their discussions, it was evident that when the other students were occupied with the school work the couple would sneak away to a secluded space within the school premises to engage in heavy petting, snogging or even have actual sexual intercourse.

In my analysis of how space determined the type of sexual activity these youths engaged in, oral sex was mentioned only in urban focus group discussions.

Bakary: Like in Palmerima, there are some houses that are not fully constructed and they sometimes go there. And most of the types of sex they have there is oral sex.

Ebrima: Also it could be at the beach where there are no people.

Sulayman: Maybe when you go to your partner's house. **(LAHS group2)**

Interviewer: You mentioned sex in the nightclubs. But how do you do it when there are other people dancing?

Kebbah: When I am in the nightclubs, it is difficult to have proper sex with the privates. But I use a finger and give her some feelings. I can finger her while we are dancing squeeze.

Fofana: Or you go to the chairs on the sides. It is dark inside. You have a quick one.

Busy: She can just sit on your laps here and you sex her. (Kotu FGD)

5.5.3.2 The location of dangerous sexuality

The notion of a dangerous sexuality, potentially leading to HIV, was sometimes discussed as located in specific places. These were notably the nightclubs, the beaches, and the residence of unchaperoned male youths. This implied that perhaps one could avoid visiting these venues as a strategy of preventing infection. While this association between space and dangerous sexual behaviour was sometimes explicitly articulated, it was also sometimes hidden, implied, or merely hinted at.

The difference is that both the man and woman need to prevent each other by being careful of the places you be at. When you are careful of this, you are likely to prevent yourself and your wife, but if you don't you may be infected of something you don't know about. (Male FGD Yallal)

Fanta: Like your partner's house. Most boys who don't stay with their parents normally do have sex with girls in their own rooms when girls visit them. If there is a boy who is staying with his parents, then he'll fear to have sex in that room. That girl will feel safe. If that boy doesn't stay with his parents, then if you go to his house, then if he wants to have sex with you, you are likely to have sex. (LAHS)

5.5.3.3 The programme and sexual processes

The most commonly mentioned space for negotiating sex was 'the programme' – an unbounded social space which involved many activities. Locations for programmes were sometimes specific for example at a night club in Serrekunda, at Jokor discotheque in Brikama, a hotel in Senegambia, or Eddie's bar and motel in Farafenni town centre, or even the mainly unused community centre close to the AFPRC hospital. Programmes also happened in the street – just like that, in a school football pitch or playground, in the courtyard of a compound, at the village *bantaba*, youth centre, the independence grounds. Basically, they also happened in temporary spaces created to celebrate the moment. Programmes involved a range of celebrations – birth, naming, marriage, excelling at something, raising money for a cause, mere merry-making, entertaining some special or prominent or rare

visitors, spontaneity, a by-passing group of *tam-tam* players could be requested to play something for a while for a fee, a visiting DJ, a public drama set-up, the presidential tour, etc. Sometimes in the rural compounds where I lived, we overturned basins to hit as drums, made music by singing and clapping, and danced as we laughed in the evenings after a day spent digging in the farms. These were our private mini-programmes attended mainly by children, youths, and women from the neighbouring compounds. They were informal and never lasted long. They were an hour at most. People then dispersed, returning to their homes with upturned basins and buckets now sitting on their heads.

Whether rural or urban, youths mostly reported that they initially met, saw, identified, or got attracted to, approached and initiated sexual relationships with a potential partner at a programme.

Int: How did you meet him?

Soda: I have always seen him around the village. I knew that he was Secka's big brother. But I had never thought that we might have something together. You see he is very serious – not like these others who always fool around.

Int: But how did you start your relationship?

Soda: It was at the programme when that son of Pa Yusupha Damfa came to visit from Dakar. They brought for the village some Senegalese musicians who had these big black radios with very loud music. You could hear the tunes from across the village, all the way to the borehole and even in the rice-fields. We came in the evening. I was with my young sister Fatou. First we were sitting down on the side, only looking. But then those Senegalese musicians can really dance and sing and they call you from the shadows and the sidelines to come in and join the circle to dance. I saw my sister Fatou jumping up to dance with some other girls from Secka's compound. So I joined them and we danced. We were chatting, laughing and dancing and watching all the other dancers. When it was almost getting dark, Fatou came pulling my hand. She gave me some mints – two black and one red. She said that Secka had given her some for her and some for me. I was happy. Eating sweets and dancing. After, when it was almost time to finish, a small boy came to where I was sitting with my friends and said in a small voice, 'Secka is near that tree. He said that when somebody sends you gifts don't you look for them and say thanks?' I did not mind him. So he ran back. And then he came again. 'Heh, Secka is calling you.' But I did not want my friends to think that I was getting bad. And yet if I did not go, the small boy might start shouting out. I was afraid that people would know me as a bad girl who goes to programmes to meet with her boy lovers. But then I knew Secka is a serious man. So I went to the tree. I found some other pairs - boy and girl, talking. It was there that Secka told me that he saw me dancing and he loved me. He gave me this bangle and

some more sweets. He said he wants us to be friends for marriage. And what do I think about it? (Rural individual interview)

In Gambian social life – whether rural or urban, Islamic, Christian or animist, elite or uneducated, employed or dependant, elderly or young, etc, ‘the programme’ is a space of excitement, thrill, pleasure, entertainment, merry-making, festivity, song, chant, drums and thriving. It is a place of freedoms that are otherwise normally forbidden. Women can let down their hair – free from the head-ties and veils, pull their ankle-length skirts up to the thighs, spread their exposed legs and freely jump high in rhythm to the clapping of on-lookers, the admiration of bystanders, the cheers of co-celebrants, and the beat of the *tam-tams*. Young children, youthful girls, and adult women jointly bend their lithe backs, sway their happy bodies, writhe their waists, buttocks and thighs in gyrating motions that seemed to mimic the motion of copulation. Back and forth the age-groups thrust as they mingle. I noticed that in the more rural areas the public dances were mostly for the females who leapt in small groups into the middle of a large circle of mostly female singers, clappers and onlookers, while the drummers were almost always male. The male villagers would stand farther away in an outer circle, looking on, occasionally forming small dancing cliques away from the main circle of action.

‘Dancing is a woman’s thing,’ some remarked when I asked them.

Even though I knew male youths and adults to participate in and enjoy social dancing, especially in the urban areas, there was a popular feminisation of dance in The Gambia. It was not uncommon for a mother to jokingly slap her young son when he openly danced in the compound *bantaba* as she remarked, ‘hey you *gor-jigen*, why are you behaving like a woman? Are you a man really? Or do you want to become a Senegalese?’

In the rural areas, public dancing was acceptable for females, but discouraged for men unless their family was known to have *griots*. Many key informants agreed.

‘A man cannot be a good Muslim and also love to dance in public.’

‘That is not respectful for a man to dance in public. It is too tempting to go and dance there with the women. How will you join other men in the mosque when it is time for *juma* prayers?’

I was both a participant and an observer of these programmes. Always the beat of the *tam-tams* and singing quickly drew a throng of collective participant singers, dancers, and on-lookers from

the neighbouring huts and houses. At the sound of the drumbeat, we quickly changed into good clothes, picked up a chair, or *togal* or a bench and made out way as fast as possible to 'the programme'. There was never need for invitation. The drums drew us from wherever we were, and whatever we were doing. Within no time, a crowd of usually hurriedly well-dressed youths, children, adult women and the occasional stray domestic animal collected around the *tam-tam* drummers. Some carried seats, some old plastic bottles of drinking water, some had babies on their hips or tugging away at a breast, and some with this or that foodstuff to sell. I loved programmes and would always show up if there was any within my hearing. If word, rumour, or gossip or news reached me about a program in a nearby vicinity, I either walked, rode my bicycle, or mobilised transport and got there. If I was living in the villages, I mostly went alone and joined other women and girls. In the towns, I always went along with Ousman and/ or other male company. When I went in company of male MRC staff, it was always interesting to observe and follow-up their sexual negotiations – successful and failed with local girls they met at the programme.

The most obvious difference between urban and rural programmes was the mixed-gender presence and participation in the urban activities. Both men and women, girls and boys attended the public programs in the towns. While dancing in the middle of a large circle of on-lookers was maintained in the earlier hours of the urban programme, often it gave way to a collective throng of mostly mixed-sex dancers in pairs, rings or clusters, and a few on-lookers seated on the sides. Perhaps this relates to the rural-urban difference of programmes: in the rural programmes villagers collected around a group of tam-tam drummers who directed the flow, style, tempo and centre of the dance, while the urban programmes mostly had amplified sound – both western international and local – blaring from loud speakers.

A level of disapproval of the programme was apparent in the narratives of some adults, some youths, etc. 'They go there to get spoilt,' was a common theme when discussing why some adults restricted their children from attending programmes within their immediate environs. Although I never caught people in the act of sexual intercourse, I often witnessed pairs of youths involved in varying degrees of physical intimacy during programmes. The narratives of many study participants

also revealed that the programme was a popular setting for initiating sexual relationships, and demonstrating romantic feelings, sexual interest, mutual companionship, etc.

5.5.4 Mobility, 'spoiling', and parental control

Int: In your point of view, how can a girl protect her virginity?

Ramatoulaye: If you want to protect your virginity, you have to know where to go and what to do. But when people sit, you go. If you want to protect yourself, if people sit – you will sit.

Khalima: Some if they are not allowed to go out they will destroy themselves.

Int: How can they destroy themselves?

Khalima: A man can know that and he waits until she is alone at the house. And he comes and gives her *attaya* which he has put something in. And when the girl drinks it, he disvirgins her.

(Jericho Wollof girls)

Mobility and exposure were often discussed as preconditions for sexual temptation which reportedly led to premarital sexual activity. Hence there were widespread discussions about the existence of restrictive parental control in a bid to protect children from 'getting spoilt'. These restrictions were especially implemented for unmarried girls still in their parents' home. This practice was reported to be rooted within *purdah* in Islam, whereby in order to preserve their purity and maintain the family honour, girls and women do not work outside the family home.

However, in all discussions where parental restriction of children's mobility outside the family compound was raised, there were also strong opposing positions particularly from female youths who were the principal targets and recipients of this parental intervention.

Haddie: To be always in the house is not good. If you get pregnant and people start asking where did she get pregnant? They will say, at her mother's house. And yet some people will be idling but when they get a husband they will be happy and people will praise them.

Nyima: To avoid pregnancy, only faithfulness can do that. There are some who are always indoors. At 7:00PM their parents will tell them to go and sleep. And mostly some of them get pregnant before marrying. To say you are not idle, or you are, or you are not '*manddo*' is nothing.

Int: What is *manddo*?

Nyima: It means discipline. (**Jericho Wollof FGD girls**)

I variously observed that while many male youths were free to leave their homes at anytime of day or night, free to go anywhere with anyone and mostly do anything, the reverse was true for their female counterparts who needed to arrange permission from their parents or other adult guardians to leave the home. They needed approval if they were going anywhere other than established spaces of operation such as school for students, the mosque for those attending *Juma* prayers on Friday, farms, or the market mostly to buy foodstuffs or other domestic products. Even for participation in my group activities, it was difficult for some girls to process and justify their requests for permission to leave home. Sometimes I had to visit parents in person, to request them to release their daughters to attend a focus group discussion away from their home. Staying out at night or beyond certain hours often meant punishment for many girls. Uncontrolled mobility for female youths was locally perceived as a precursor to getting spoilt through too much sexual activity.

5.5.4.1 ‘*Tassarreh!*’ - Spoiling

Ahmed: Some may love you for *tassarreh!*

Int: What is *tassarreh*?

Ahmed: Destroy!

Fatou: Spoiling.

Jainaba: Loving her because she is sexy and you want her for sex only. (**LAHS mixed**)

There were large undertones of a local concept of pollution of youths through sexuality. It was often expressed in terms of ‘spoiling’, ‘destroying’, ‘make you bad’, ‘devaluing’. When discussing qualities that girls look for in a boy for a sexual relationship, seriousness was variously mentioned. Further investigation about what this meant to the girls, unfolded a myriad of nuances related to ‘spoiling’. Several interviews echoed the basic emic conceptualization: ‘a serious guy will not spoil you even when you have a sexual relationship with him’. In most of the youths’ data, ‘spoiling’ was mostly done to girls and sexually inactive women by boys and men.

There were diverse meanings associated with the concept. Moving around to bad places could spoil a person, just like hanging out with bad company could. At this level of meaning, spoiling was achieved by association either with a place inhabited by potentially corrupting influences, and also through impartation from persons (male or female) who were already spoilt. Such people were often described as speaking foul sexually explicit language, dressing obscenely, renowned to be sexually immoral or 'unable to keep one sexual partner for a long time', 'too westernised to appreciate the proper way that one should conduct oneself', given to bad habits like drug-taking, alcohol consumption, going to nightclubs, etc.

An alternative meaning of 'spoiling' was centred around sexualisation processes²³. Briefly spoiling was engaging in a sexual relationship which ended up in premarital pregnancy, or a sexual relationship that did not lead to marriage. Because the effects of spoiling mainly impacted upon a girl's sexual worth, or her value as a potential marriage partner, it was deeply condemned from the girls' perspective.

Njilang: If I thought that you want to marry me, I will move with you. But if I know that you want to spoil me, I will not go with you.

Int: How do boys spoil girls?

Zaina: Somebody can tell you, 'I love you.' He doesn't love you. He just want to spoil you.

He can pregnant you and run away. He will say that he is not the one. (NYSS tailoring school mixed FGD)

Denial of responsibility of impregnating girls prior to marriage was mentioned as a common practice. This was largely because of the high social stigmatisation of premarital sex as a violation of Islamic laws of ordering sexualization processes. Premarital sex was evidence of a breach of religious moralisations of sexuality, and thus brought shame to the individual youths in the sexual relationship, and their families. Discussing with parents and elder brothers, it was evident that family honour was crucial to uphold and often lay in the public sexual demeanour or presentation of the women folk and girls within the family. Before the sexual reputation of mothers, sisters, aunts, mothers-in-law, etc,

²³ Cf. Nyanzi, Nyanzi and Kalina 2005 where I discuss the nuanced notion of spoiling as applied to another setting – southwest Uganda.

came the urgency for daughters in the compound to conform and adhere to strict codes of sexual propriety in order to safeguard **the name** – i.e. the public image and reputation of the compound. Brothers, fathers, uncles, nephews, etc had the role, responsibility and task to ensure that their unmarried females stayed free from *spoiling*. From participant observation, I established that male family members often mobilised active support of some notable female relatives (particularly elder married sisters, grandmothers and mothers) to devise and implement schemes to monitor, sabotage, check, restrict and attempt to control the sexuality of their unmarried females so that they remained within boundaries of what was socially perceived and approved of as proper. Family honour largely depended on the respectability of young females in any compound.

5.5.5 Birds of a feather flock together

Do not be deceived, bad company corrupts good morals. 1Corinthians 15:33

In their discussions of spoiling, peer influence through bad company was another factor that contributed to potential spoiling of a female youth. While analysing cliques of belonging in the different available youth subcultures, I established that many participants believed that friends knew each other well. Therefore if one were to influence behaviour change, there was potential to work through peer-group leaders who were already lay role models in those subcultures and cliques of belonging. Likewise if one wanted to prevent young unmarried female youths from getting spoilt, one controlled the circle of friends they were allowed to associate and identify with.

Binta: Two friends who mean it, if the other one wants to spoil herself, the other one will know it.' (Jericho Wollof youth FGD)

5.5.5.1 Hanging out, chilling and bonding

Vast data on patterns and practices of leisure were generated from asking what activities youths of the two genders engaged in during their free time. My observations and the reported behaviour in the qualitative data confirmed my initial assumption that out-of-work activities shaped the sexualisation processes of the youths I studied. Leisure was mostly an urban phenomenon.

Int: Where do the boys in this area spend their free time? Do you know leisure time?

Mina: Yes. Some boys sit at the ghetto. When girls pass they call and follow them.

Int: Apart from calling girls, what else do boys do? Do they only sit and call girls?

Sarai: Smoking cigarettes.

Binta: Chatting about girls, movies, cars, nonsense chats.

Demba: We also drink *attaya*. Yes.

Mina: If he is a working class, when weekend comes he goes to the nightclubs for enjoyments. **(NYSS tailoring school mixed-sex FGD)**

‘Girls do housework, boys have fun!’ the data mostly seemed to suggest. I had to explain the translation and meaning of leisure many times when the topic was introduced to study participants. Many took long to grasp the concept. Several female youths often listed housework chores as the activities they engaged in during their leisure time. The patterns of leisure were highly gendered. In their free time girls reported that they engaged in activities that I still deemed work, including washing, cleaning, sweeping, mopping, laundering, cooking, plaiting hair, crocheting, etc. After prompting, they then mentioned drinking *attaya*, and conversation with their friends. The boys mentioned a wide range of activities available to them including hanging out, conversing at their *voos*²⁴, drinking *attaya*, day dreaming about travelling abroad, playing indoor games, clubbing, going to dances, programmes, smoking cigarettes or marijuana, watching movies or videos, listening to music, visiting each other, swimming at the beaches, etc. A few rural male youths mentioned hunting wild game.

However breaking from this stereotypical presentation of girls’ leisure activities, there were some forthright participants who acknowledged that even local Gambian girls did take a break from the drudgery of house-chores and had fun. Unsurprisingly, these accounts were mainly from urban-based data sets.

Dijah: Some girls go to the hall at night to enjoy. Just to enjoy.

Int: How do girls enjoy the clubs? What do they do when they go to enjoy the clubs at night?

Dijah: Just to go and follow their boyfriends and sit. There is nothing there.

Hawah: Just sitting and listening. **(NYSS tailoring school mixed FGD)**

²⁴ Informal meeting place for urban youths to chat, usually on the sidewalks of street corners.

5.5.6 Qualities to look for in a potential sexual partner

Participants mentioned a range of factors that drew them sexually to members of the opposite sex. Umbrella categorisation of these factors generally fell into physical attributes; social status including family background, ethnicity, education, etc.; financial standing or income including wealth, possessions, established properties, number of businesses, employment status, ability to provide, etc.; religiosity usually measured by the extent of public enactments of devotion to Islam; character or personality; known sexual behaviour, sexual history and sexual reputation. Many of the male youth participants reported that their decision to get sexually involved with a girl was coloured by her physical attributes – which were an important quality. Although there were individual and sub-group variations, the majority of male youths mentioned that it was important that their potential girlfriend had specific physical attributes namely a big bottom, a comparatively thin ‘wasp-like’ waist, firm breasts, a fine skin – described as smooth skin, without rashes, pimples or being too dry; and a sexy gait. So popular were big female bottoms that a favourite local popular song we often danced to unashamedly praised the big bottoms of young women.

Int: You kept talking of a sexy girl. What is a sexy girl like?

Yankuba: A sexy girl can be a very attractive girl who has a figure eight. Very sexy.

Moudou: Like you know, she could be so attractive. Whenever you see her. Then and also she could be someone whose got a very good structure.

Omar: A big butt and big boobs. [Laughter]

Lamin: A sexy girl is a girl that has the certificate of a woman... um buttocks, figure eight, red lips, big breasts, big buttocks and nice structure. (LAHS mixed FGD)

For many female youths, the sexual character of the boy played a significant role in determining whether they got sexually interested in him. They often reported that they looked for a ‘serious’ boy – meaning that they were interested in a boy who was not promiscuous - having several sexual partners at a go, ‘picking this one and then dropping her and getting another one just like that’, ‘...seriously focusing on just me alone until we marry or he leaves me,’ ‘who can say no to girls even when they offer themselves to him’, etc. In addition, a serious boy was not only interested in sex while in the

company of his girl friend, but could also engage in other platonic activities for example encouraging the girl to concentrate on her studies, planning to make some money, discussing productive ideas to help in future.

Binta: A serious boy doesn't have two or three girlfriends. (NYSS tailoring school mixed FGD)

Jatou: Because when I love you and you always tell me, 'Let's go to bed,' I will not like you. I will hate you. (NYSS tailoring school)

5.5.6.1 Notions of beauty, sexual appeal and attraction

The concealed female body was a dominant script of feminine codes of beauty as enshrined within Islamic ethos. I observed that young women received greater appreciation when their clothes were long enough to cover most of their body, not only in the rural provinces, but also in many urban spaces. This perhaps explains the tension within personal narratives of liberated educated urban females who enjoyed wearing western fashions widely seen on television and other local popular media. Western dress was variously associated with modernity, advancement, being chic, and sophistication. It was also a marker of urbanity, proximity to the West through travel or relatives living in the Diaspora, importation, etc. On the other hand the revealed female body was sometimes discussed as an item of sexual temptation that polluted the observing religious males by inciting thoughts of a sexual nature. Some older key informants even went as far as claiming that when female youths dressed in ways that revealed their bodies, they also corrupted the minds of young children by exposing them to the mature body before they were old enough to control their sexual thoughts. Following from this perspective, revealing clothes were associated with spoilt females in that it could be a way of communicating sexual desire, a characteristic trademark of girls who were sexually active with many men and needed to pull more into their trap, etc. It was also linked to shameless irreligious female youths, who were variously deemed unattractive by some participants. Although the majority of boys and girls reported that they preferred a measure of modesty in female youths, some male youths claimed that they were attracted to girls because they had seen their exposed bodies, or their figures through tight clothes.

Resp: In recent days, because of the girls' dress mode and self esteem, Muslim men approach them for marriage in the Islamic rules and regulations. But a woman's dressing can prevent a man from approaching her for marriage.

Resp: The reason why men approach women for marriage is their dressing style. If she dresses in a good way, any man who sees her would love to marry her. Their dressing and hair plaiting cannot let a man pass by them. When he sees you, he cannot pass you.

Resp: In most instances a person is loved for his or her behaviour or attitude which also can make him or her hated. No human being hates another but the individuals hate themselves first before being hated by another. If your attitude makes people hate you, no one would like you. Most of these charity candles people bring wishing to be this or that, is because you are not contented. When you have self esteem, people would come to you.

Res: Yes, before people go to *marabouts* or mosques with candles, seeking prayers so that they could be liked, it is their attitudes which should change first. **(FGD Male youths)**

The *ibadu*- meaning a veil that totally covers the head, hair, facial features except for tiny slits for the eyes, the neck and shoulders, was also discussed with ambivalence. While many participants appreciated women and young girls who wore it, reading this as a symbol of Islamic piety and devotion, many others argued that their faith necessitated more than physical outward appearances.

Nusrat: You can wear that *ibadu* day and night when you are still having very wicked thoughts in your heart and that is not good as a Muslim. It is better that you do not cover your head and you have a heart which is clean, thinking good about your fellow humans. But then if you have envy, jealousy, malice, bad heart, greed, hypocrisy, hatred and such bad things in you, it is not good for the faith.

However there was a class of male youth participants who reported that they would seriously consider having a girlfriend if she wore *ibadu* because to them it was a symbol of seriousness in her commitment to Islam. Some reported that it also showed she was raised well, or from a sound Islamic background, etc.

Hair played a central role in lay constructions of feminine beauty. Girls and women spent a significant proportion of their time tending to their hair: washing, conditioning, plaiting, combing,

unplaiting, treating, waxing, oiling, styling, fashioning, treating, straightening, etc. Money was paid for local purchases of different types of hair food, gels, oils, combs, dyes, tints, accessories like beads, puff-holders, styling combs, crowns, head scarves, caps, hats, etc. There was a wide knowledge of locally available natural hair-growth enhancers such as *henna* flowers and leaves for thicker darker hair, coconut oil for length, mashed avocados to treat the scalp against itching, shea butter to reduce flaking and dandruff, egg yolk for soft texture, etc. Well-groomed hair was an important aspect of female youths' beauty. People deciphered how modern one's outlook was on life depending on one's hair style (see also Nyamnjoh, Durham and Fokwang's (2002) discussion about the domestication of hair in Cameroon). While many rural female youths invested time and money in paying their friends to groom their hair, several urban ones could afford to go to hair-salons to have their hair cared for. Others bartered services. Similar to dress fashions, hair styles also came and went: there were contemporary designs, and outmoded ones. In order to enhance her beauty and sexual appeal, a female youth could manipulate her hair. Artificial extensions that simulated the straightness, colour, length and texture of *Toubab* hair were in vogue when I conducted my fieldwork. Skin lightening creams were also used by some girls who thought fairer skin had higher appeal.

Beyond the focus on the body, was the role of clothes, costume, appearance in presenting people as either sexually desirable or not.

Sarjo: What boys see in girls to love them, most girls put on short skirts and tops which the boys see and become madly in love with them. Eventually the boy tells the love in him.

Neneh: What girls put on nowadays are short and they show up in such dressing which shows their body marking especially those with big hips and they are the things which the boys cannot let go to escape them. They always follow such girls who might be yearning for that as well.

Adama: When boys see girls in such dressing, they also follow them because they are moved or attracted by it.

Sarjo: When a girl puts on transparent clothes through which a person can see the honoured parts of you, boys would not leave you alone when they see you. They must tell you the love

in them since they have seen everything of you. Boys would not allow you to go away with that nakedness without telling you love. (Yallal fgd girls)

Among these female youths it was apparent that fashion, desire and the erotic merged to relay enactments of locally nuanced elements of sexuality using the combined media of dress, body exposure and body movement. Encoded within the concealed, or revealed female body, and how it was presented, positioned or motioned, were performances of sexual interest, desire, longing, the need to communicate to, the aim to attract members of the opposite sex. On their part, the male targets of these performances were not only expected to decode the messages and respond accordingly, but they also did so. In cases where a boy was seriously interested, he responded by initiating sexual advances either through asking about the girl's character and then approaching her through a middle-man or going to her in person. The contradiction of socially unacceptable dressing for females attracting boys who found it sexy illustrated the 'lure of forbidden fruit'.

For many other youths, the inner personality of the individual was more important than external qualities. They reported that they were attracted to a person who exuded self-confidence, self-esteem, self-love, self-respect, integrity, trust, discretion, wisdom, etc. Rather than the physique, it was the attitude towards life that mattered in this case.

Facilitator: What are the qualities found on girls which cause men to approach them?

Resp: That is when a woman ties beads on her waist. When she ties it on and she passes any man, he must be attracted.

Resp: Love doesn't count on putting on *jaljali* – waist beads. You know a woman is made from a man. An example of it is when a woman sleeps with her little child on a bed, anytime she is awake, she places her hand on the child. This is the reason: if a woman is made out of a man, anytime he sees the body of a woman which is from his body, he feels and loves her at heart without realising it. Once a man sees an exposed part of a woman, he loves her instantly. That is why Islam urges women to cover their bodies.

Resp: A woman should always put on good clothes to cover herself - which is the best. But some women put on certain things which could reduce their dignity.

Resp: What makes women loved by men is their attitudes. When a man is confident about a woman's attitude, then he loves her. If you trust her attitude and marry her, you can bring up a good family.

Resp: The reason for loving a girl is when you see good attitude in her, she is from a good family, and parents. Then you can ask her hand for marriage. Also she should be someone contented, by that she should not be a person who walks and goes out a lot, does not have so many friends, she does not involve herself in so many things. She is holy to keep herself through the religion and respects elders. With these characters, you can love a girl for marriage. But a girl whose going out has no restriction or respect can prevent her from getting a husband even when they like her. **(Yallal FGD Males)**

Ideals of feminine beauty that led men to yearn sexual partnerships revolved around the image of a self-controlled female revealed in an appropriately covered body, a good family background, apparent religiosity, limited mobility, restricted social life, respect for the generations, limited involvement in public festivities alone. For many male youths, a really modest and temperate femininity was attractive, and good for a wife! This perspective was not limited to rural uneducated youths, but even held by many powerful urban elite men with the social economic and political resources that enabled them choice. Although they enjoyed access to other performances of femininity, many preferred this controlled version believed to be more amenable to rural-based, born and bred female youths. A common theme in the data on multiple sexual partnerships was 'I married a cool village girl, but also need to sleep with the fire of a town woman!' The need to test the variations of 'women' was a common justification for getting extra-marital sexual partners while on trek, sampling commercial women, and an explanation for the rising incidence of HIV transmission.

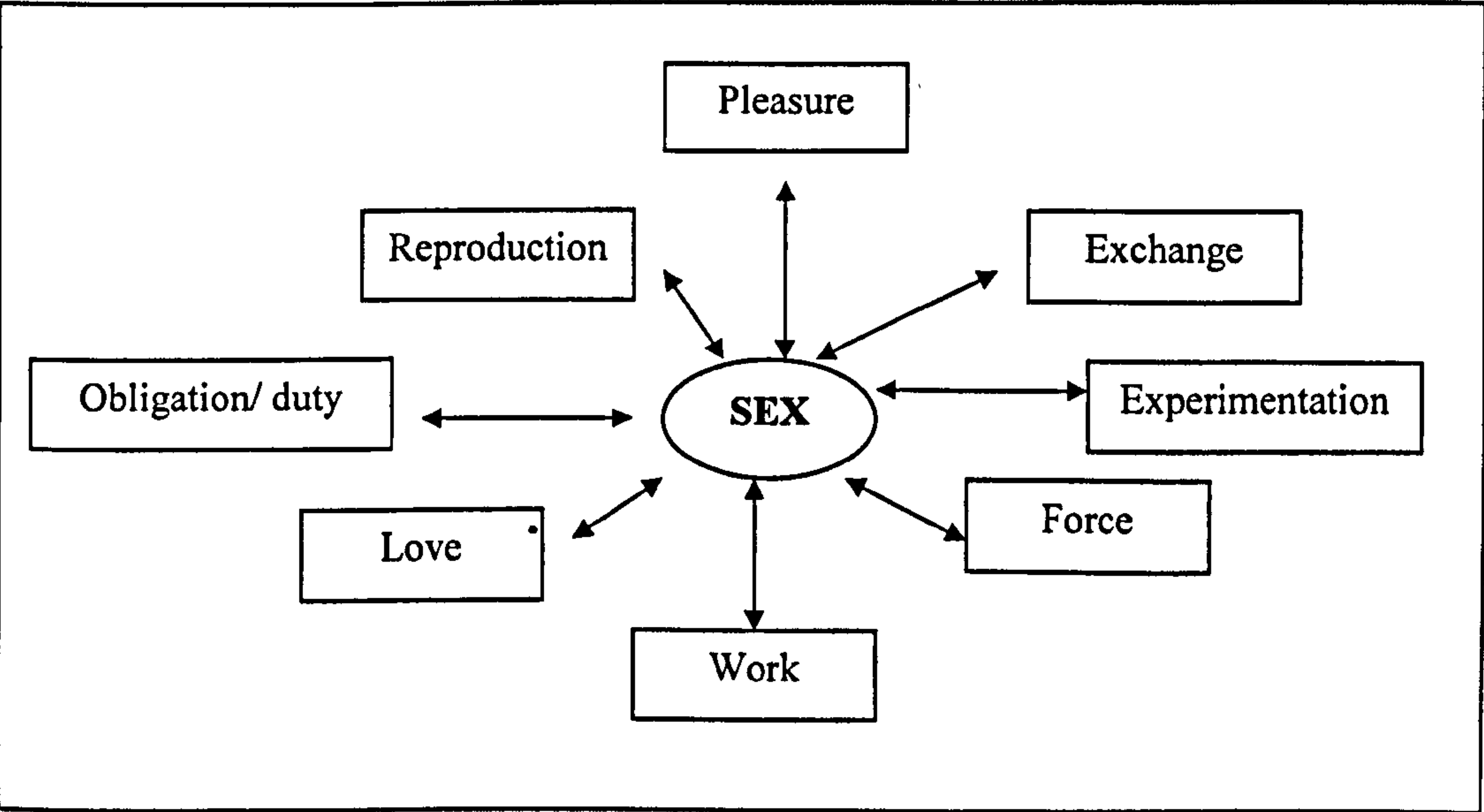
Two qualities stood out, when participants were asked what women saw in a man that made him attractive for love or even marriage. His material possessions, wealth, income, state of earnings, financial ability to take responsibility for a woman or a family, were a range of qualities that could be summed up as his wealth. The second most popular quality, was his physical appeal variously presented as his handsomeness, body build, appearance, having good muscles, a good face, a good voice, a clean well-kept body in good clothing. In some cases, study participants argued that even

where a man was ugly or not well-bodied, if he was rich, there would be many girls following him for sex just to get some of his money.

5.5.7 Why sex?

Sex held various meanings for different youths in the study. The meanings associated with sex were sometimes multiple even within an individual. In other cases, the meaning(s) that an individual attached to sex, transformed, took on new nuances, or even expired with the passage of time or change of settings. What sex meant in a relationship with one sexual partner did not always hold true for another. What sex meant when youths were younger, changed when they grew older. Values attached to sex when it was performed within the context of marriage differed from those they held when it was outside marriage. These disparities in meanings were interesting and confirmed that ‘sex is not merely about sex’.

Figure 5.6 Meanings associated with sexual activity (adapted from Nyanzi 2002:12)



Early sexual activity was mainly for experimentation – ‘to see what it is like’, ‘to see what the big fuss was about’, ‘to experience feelings of sex’, ‘to explore the body of a girl and see if I can also penetrate like others’, ‘to learn about it’, ‘touching and seeing if she was feeling like I was feeling...’

etc. Some youths reported they began with self-experimentation through masturbation. This was more commonly reported by boys than girls.

Moussa: First time I was just enjoying myself alone. I would wait in the night and I would squeeze my mattress to get some feelings. Before long this was not enough. I wanted a girl to feel the difference, to know for myself. **(Kotu FGD)**

Bonnie: I was around twelve or thirteen when I had the first wet dream. It was like I was urinating but also very strong swellings of good feelings. When I woke my shorts were wet like with pee. I wanted to repeat that feeling another time, so I rubbed my organ. But it was not easy because I was feeling guilty. **(IDI Yallal)**

Sexual pleasure was another reason for sexual relationships. Described as ‘making feelings’, ‘getting release’, ‘coming’, ‘climaxing’, ‘satisfying the body’, ‘solving the problem’, pleasure from sexual activity was reported to be a natural consequence of sexual activity. Some participants believed that ‘sex was a gift from Allah which he gave to human beings to enjoy each other’. According to this line of thought, sex was created to be pleasurable. As such they reported that if individuals were experiencing problems such as impotence, premature ejaculation, lack of lubrication, pain during sexual intercourse, frigidity, failure to climax, etc., *marabouts* could utilise Qur’anic scriptures to restore the pleasure of sex. In this regard, some youths reported that foreplay was a compulsory component of their sexual lives.

Sex was also reportedly an expression of love, commitment, romantic involvement, emotional attachment to another. In the data about initiating sexual relationships, some female youths reported that their boyfriends pestered them with conditional clauses to illustrate their seriousness by becoming sexually involved. ‘He told me that I should have sex with him as proof of my love to him,’ was a common rejoinder in the individual interviews. A few male youths reported that for them sexual intercourse marked the turning point in their relationships with girls; from a casual acquaintance to someone that they would be interested in considering for marriage. ‘If I have sex with a girl I know that she is serious about loving me, and maybe I should marry her,’ they reasoned. Others argued that

if a girl gave in quickly to their demands for sex, then they would not trust her to refuse having sex with other boys who showed similar interest or made similar requests thereafter.

Figure 5.7 Local languages for expressing love

Expression	Wollof	Mandinka	Fula
To want (something)	<i>Dama buga</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To want (someone)	<i>Dama buga</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To like (something)	<i>Dama buga</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To like (a hobby)	<i>Dama buga</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To need (something)	<i>Dama shohla</i>	<i>Nsulata</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To need (a doctor)	<i>Dama shohla</i>	<i>Nsulata</i>	<i>Mina sohli/ yedi</i>
To enjoy doing something	<i>Dama ban nehku</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To enjoy (music)	<i>Dama buga</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To love	<i>Dama nop</i>	<i>Kanu</i>	<i>Yed</i>
Love – the noun	<i>Mbugel</i>	<i>Kanoo</i>	<i>Nged-ngu</i>
I love (my son)	<i>Dama buga</i>	<i>Nlafita/ kanu</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
I love (my donkey)	<i>Dama buga</i>	<i>Nlafita/ Kanu</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
I love (ice cream)	<i>Dama buga</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
I love (my husband)	<i>Dama nop</i>	<i>Kanu</i>	<i>Mina yedi/ nopi</i>
I love you	<i>Dama la nop/ buga</i>	<i>Kanu</i>	<i>Mina ma yedi</i>
To desire (something)	<i>Neu</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To desire (someone)	<i>Neu/ Mara</i>	<i>Nsulata</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
I would like to have	<i>Dama buga am</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Mina yedi</i>
To make love ²⁵	<i>Won mbugel</i>	<i>Kanoo sitandi</i>	
To have sex ²⁶	<i>Sei</i>	<i>Futuwo</i>	
To have sex with a wife	<i>Sei</i>	<i>Futuwo</i>	
To have sex with a <i>chagga</i>	<i>Njalo</i>	<i>Ja??</i>	<i>Fijo</i>
To attract someone	<i>Buga</i>	<i>Meya/ nlafita</i>	<i>Yedi</i>
I am attracted to	<i>Buga</i>	<i>Nlafita</i>	<i>Yedi</i>

* Note: The distinction was mainly between platonic and non-platonic sentiment.

In some narratives, sex was perceived and presented as a matter of course. In this view, sex occurred naturally; in progression and as an indication of physical maturity. This was a widely held belief, even by adults. I often observed parents and elders consorting to pair off, or marry off an assumedly ‘grown up’ youth who was delaying to become sexually active, and more importantly – reproductive. It was not uncommon for older siblings to be sent to inquire why such a youth was

²⁵ *Won mbugel* in Wollof, and *Kanoo sitandi* in Mandinka are both translated as ‘to show love’ and are not restricted to sexual intercourse but rather refer to the range of ways in which a couple can show their love to one another.

²⁶ The translations provided here are the polite forms. However I found euphemisms such as ‘*tukunyu, tokotoko*, and ‘eating benechin’ which were peculiar to cliques; their meaning was unknown to the wider community.

postponing their sexual involvement, such that if there were a problem, interventions could be sought from *marabouts* on behalf of the concerned youth.

Bubu: When you grow up without showing any interest in finding a girl to marry and have children, they will start asking questions. Even your mother can get worried because she will fear that maybe you have a problem with your manhood. Because we all know that when a boy becomes a man, he needs to get a woman to start having children and being responsible.

Related to this point, sex was engaged in out of a sense of duty or obligation to the marital spouse because it was expected in order to fulfil lineage and kinship responsibilities. In addition to providing sexual gratification for the couple, this obligatory sexual activity was also intended to yield children at some point.

For some individuals, sex was a result of peer pressure. They either wanted to fit in with their friends or they were influenced into making sexual choices by their friends pushing them in that direction. This was reportedly more common for younger male youths who were presented as highly gullible and less under the control or scrutiny of their parents and other adult guardians. Participants suggested that it was easier for male youths to get involved in sexual activities without detection by adults. Peer pressure was a form of external force luring youths into sexual relationships. Another external influence mostly mentioned by male youths was watching sexually explicit media like pornographic videos, or x-rated adult web sites, and magazines like Playboy.

Matarr: And then because of these pornographic films. You see these sexy things. And these things, most young people want to experience what they see in those films. **(LAHS Boy FGD)**

Carlos: I cannot watch all those porns without wanting to get a woman. You see even your dick stands up straight by just watching. It says go and get someone. Go and get someone. If you are not careful you can even buy a *chagga*. **(FGD Tallinding)**

Rape was reported to happen particularly in sites labelled as settings for 'dangerous sexuality' such as nightclubs and the company of alcohol-consumers. Forced sex was also couched in the popular urban legends of *kkikiriki* discussed above.

Sex as a commodity of exchange, was a key feature of the sexual liaisons of *bumsters* (see Nyanzi et al. 2005 for a detailed discussion). For the *chagga*, sex was work; that is how they made their living. They were paid financially for their services.

5.5.7.1 Saying 'I love you!'

I investigated the meanings of saying 'I love you' in inter-gender relationships. For many youths, it was one sure sign of commitment in their sexual relationships. Some boys complained that girls needed to be told they were loved all the time and easily became agitated if the boy did not say it. For many, the expression was reserved for only serious relationships. Many male youth participants said that used the expression 'I love you' to signal sexual interest in a girl, and they would never use it for a platonic relationship – no matter how serious. They reported that it connoted 'a big thing'.

There were some reports that revolved around the usage of 'I love you' by tricksters who were not seriously interested in the wellbeing of the person they addressed, but only wanted to excite them sexually, get them into bed, and then dump them. A few urban girls reported that in school, some male youths would bet among themselves that they would convince a particular girl into having sex with them. In their attempts to score points with their friends by succeeding to have sex with the girl in question, they reportedly told '...her that I love you just to melt her and she thinks you are seriously in love with her.' Others reported that the words were sometimes used by 'naughty boys to just enjoy her and tell his boys' about her response or reaction.

Many participants agreed that it took a measure of bravery to openly declare one's love. Related to the local gendered norms of initiating sexual relationships, some participants claimed it was only spoilt girls who openly declared their love to their partners.

Mussu: When a boy is a coward, the boy cannot tell a girl that I love you. Then the boy will do it through letters. I like writing letters to that girl or short notes. Writing short notes saying that I love you. (LAHS)

Kine: If they are not relating, it is bad for a girl to say to a boy that she loves him. People read it differently. Like she is cheap. And she is a bad influence. So people see it as something bad for a girl to tell a guy that I love you. (LAHS)

5.5.8 Pet names and terms of endearment

Pseudonyms, nicknames, and incognito identities are a common facet of male youth colloquial subcultures in The Gambia. Similar to the beach-boys and male youths involved in the tourism industry on the beaches along the Atlantic coast, several male youths from the rural areas, in school, in other urban circles e.g. fishermen, police, traders, footballers, or just in their local cliques meeting in the voos, had adopted other names that they were popularly called by²⁷.

It was against this background, in addition to the observed need to conceal premarital sexual interest or activity that I got interested in the codes, codification, and symbols that premarital lovers employed in their sexual relationships. I reasoned that if there were nicknames used in the household by compound members, joking names used in joking relationships, colloquial names used in cliques or immediate sub-culture of affiliation, etc, there must be pet names shared between lovers.

In relationships, youths often adopted new terms of endearment for their lovers. Participant observation and direct questioning generated a variety of expressions. Some were local to the context,

²⁷ Sometimes these were the names of international footballers for example Zinadine Zidane, Ronaldino Ronaldo, Pele, Henry Thierry, John Barnes, Diego Maradona, David Beckham, etc, or film stars including Jackie Chan, Bruce Lee, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Van Damme, or the names of presidents such as Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Bill Clinton, Charles Taylor – common one, Mandela, Saddam Hussein, reggae singers especially those from the Caribbean Islands such as Frankie Paul, Chokey Taylor, Winston Rodney, Dennis Brown, and of course Bob Marley, Lucky Dube. Some fascinating ones whose logic I was able to make out included names like Coca Cola, Fanta, Sprite, Seven Up, or Nescafe, Baraccuda, lady fish, Benechin and Afra – the names of drink, beverages and food. It was also common to bear the nickname from letters of the alphabet which sometimes corresponded to one or more initials of the individual, although some individuals chose unique identifiers for example XQ is the colloquial name we called Ebou who was in charge of the internet café I frequented in Serrekunda. Some used Greek letters e.g. Alpha, Omega and Pii were common. From participant observation I noticed, observed and gradually confirmed that some individuals had a collection of nicknames collected over time and variously used in different contexts. For example Ousman Bah was also called Pascal, OB, Ous, 24, Pass24, Boddomboddomb, Becho, OB24, Oyoyo, *Kangaado*, Papa Jos, Ousbah, etc – depending on who was addressing him, or in which environment he was in. Sulayman Joof was also called - (i.e. his actual names), *Buki*, Uncle Saul, Bisenty, etc. I frequently heard Kekutan Kandeh my translator called Cakes while among his peers. For long, I only knew Ousman Rosenberg-Jallow as Marcos. It was not until I had to sign a contract of employment with him that I learnt his actual names. Furthermore, when posting mail, I sometimes have to call up friends, or research participants in The Gambia to confirm that I have actually addressed them correctly because in our previous dealings I basically addressed them by their nicknames which are not necessarily known in all the different contexts they operate. For example my mail to Easy E, who received translated transcripts and posted them to me while I was writing up in London, never reached his post from me because he is known by his official names at the postal address that I used.

These alternative names or multiple identities are not about deception or even camouflage. It is not the individual named who adopts them, but rather the names arise out of a situation of proximity, intimacy, shared experience, closeness, joviality, shared meaning and identity-making. The other people around the individual either observe a common characteristic, quality, activity, or resemblance etc which resonates with another elsewhere. Therefore they give this nickname which rubs onto the named individual, circulates among those in close proximity, and soon catches the imagination of others within that circle. They too begin to address this individual thus. After a while, the name sticks – sometimes becoming even more pronounced or well-known than the given or official names.

some were unique colloquial terms restricted in usages to specific locales or sub-cultures or specific cliques, and others were typically recognised expressions of love in the English language. 'Baby Sai', 'Choof', 'Suma faar bi', 'suma jabarr', 'Cheppenh', 'darling', 'My one and only one,' 'my babe', 'my boyfriend/ girlfriend', etc were common labels for lovers.

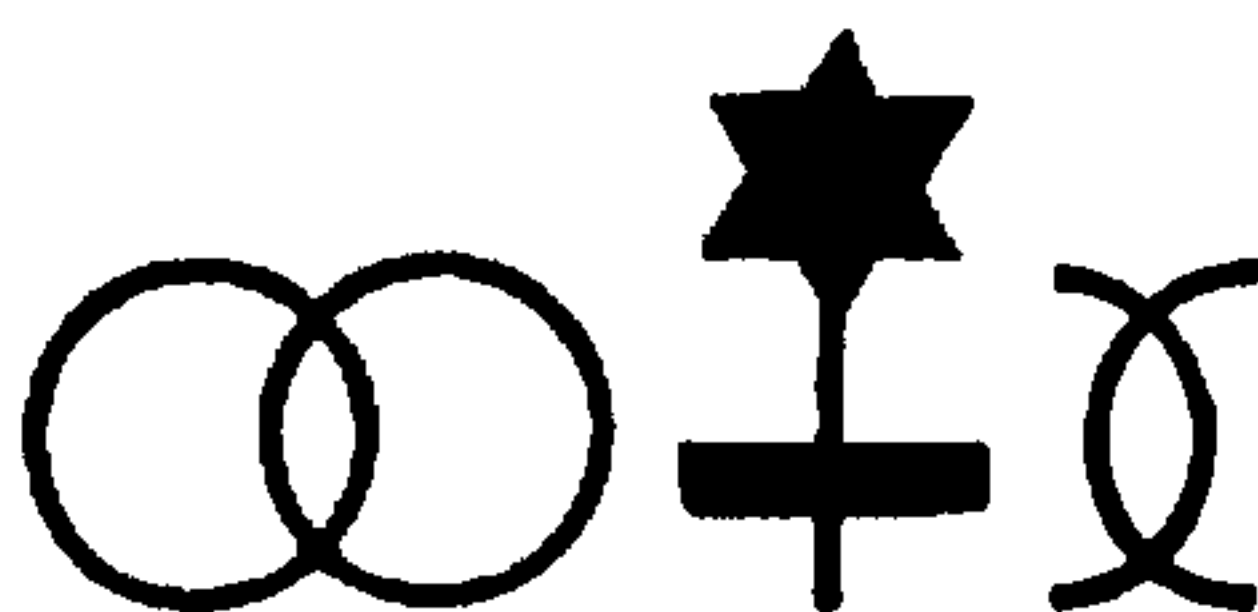
Cheppenh (- meaning pretty young lovely thing in Wollof) was a popular local word whose meaning and usage surpassed reference to only the sexual partner in one's life. When a pretty young female went past a group of boys sitting in the voos idling the hours away with *attaya*, conversation, reggae music, it was common for them to call out at her, '*Cheppenh! Eh cheppenh!*' When a child, a youth or an adult dressed well for an occasion, or had a new hair-do, it was common to remark, 'You are a *cheppenh*, deh!' Not only was *cheppenh* a term of endearment for female sexual partners, it was also a compliment for female beauty, chic appearance, and attractiveness. *Cheppenh* was also employed by males to tease females. It was sometimes used sarcastically to remark upon unappealing appearance. The term had spaces in which it was proper. If usage traversed the boundaries of proper usage, *cheppenh* could become a term of ridicule, insult, mockery or even conflict.

I remember a taxi *aparante* receiving an earful of rebuke and correction from an elderly lady he referred to as *cheppenh* when he was helping her into a taxi to Farafenni. She repeatedly lectured him about frivolously misusing the label, and stepping out of place.

'You should know your level young man! How can you call me a *cheppenh*? Nonsense! What is with the youths of today? Do you know me? Have you seen me before? How can you refer to me – someone old enough to be your grandmother, as *cheppenh*? I am someone's wife! I am not your *cheppenh*! You should know when to say what and to whom!' On and on she rambled as the *gelegele* rattled down the pothole-filled road, raising clouds of dust on its way.

But on many other occasions, the label *cheppenh* brought smiles, coyness, love-struck looks in eyes, or giggles from youthful girls who often responded with a chuckle, emphasised wriggling of their bottoms as they walked, or a fiery embrace for the benefit of their male admirer. While *cheppenh* was often reserved for younger females that one was acquainted with, it was also sometimes used for complete strangers. For example Susan was often referred to as 'That *cheppenh*' by *bumsters* on the

beach during our fieldwork with them. Investigations about the reasons for this, elucidated it was on account of her big eyes and soft voice – the marks of true feminine beauty in their opinion.



Chapter 6: Marriage – A web of complex meanings

The first time he had seen her, he was seated as usual in front of Haj Ismail's shop. He glimpsed her supple body as she walked along the river bank carrying an earthenware jar on her head. Turning to Haj Ismail, he had whispered, 'That girl over there. Who's she?'

'Fatheya, the daughter of Masoud,' answered Haj Ismail.

'Her father is that poor man then. No doubt he would be happy to have me as a member of the family?'

'Do you mean that you want to marry her, Sheikh Hamzawi?'

'Why not? I have been married three times and still have no son. I must have a son before I die.'

'But she is young enough to be one of your grandchildren,' said Haj Ismail. 'Besides, how do you know that she will not remain childless like your previous wives?'

Sheikh Hamzawi bowed his head to the ground in silence, but the rosary beads continued to run uninterruptedly through his fingers, impelled by a mechanism of their own. Haj Ismail eyed him with a knowing smile. He burst into a laugh, cut it short abruptly and said, 'It looks as though the girl has turned your head for you, Sheikh Hamzawi.'

Sheikh Hamzawi smiled quietly and looked at the village barber with a gleam in his eyes. 'Verily the look of her revived my spirit. I've always longed for the kind of female she is.'

'Talking of females, female she certainly is. Her eyes seethe with desire. But do you think you can keep her under control, Sheikh Hamzawi? Do you think a man of your age can take her on?'

'I can satisfy not only her, but her father if necessary,' retorted Sheikh Hamzawi. 'It's only what you have in your pocket that counts where a man is concerned.'

'What will you do if the years go by and she does not give you a son?' enquired Haj Ismail.

'Allah is great, Haj Ismail. I am going through difficult times, but they will soon be over. God will breathe his spirit into me, and give me strength.'

Haj Ismail laughed out loudly. 'Those are the kind of things you can say to other people, but not to me, Sheikh Hamzawi. You haven't stopped complaining to me about your condition. How can Allah give you strength? Are you insinuating that God will..?' El Saadawi (1974:28)

As discussed in the preceding chapter, marriage is a key point of reference for constructing diverse meanings of sexuality among youths in The Gambia. Whether or not their sexual behaviour is located within the boundaries of marriage, generally determines whether it is socially acceptable or taboo. In this chapter I describe ethnographic data pertaining to marriage arrangement patterns, specifically highlighting the inherent complexities of different systems of negotiating for marriage. I begin with describing the members of Amie's household¹, focussing on three female Fula youths who were 'given' to her as children. I then examine their respective distinct processes of achieving marriage. I chose these three girls because I was able to observe their premarital lives, saw them going through diverse forms of sexualisation, followed through aspects of their marital discussions, participated in their eventual marriage ceremonies and lived with them as they negotiated both motherhood and/ or co-wifing. This analysis often feeds into discussions of other contemporary marital forms within the wider lineages, kin groups and genealogical structures of these three youths.

Thereafter, I discuss two urban youths – one a Serahule from the coastal compound I lived in, the other – a young lady I met in Banjul but whose marriage processes changed her residential setting to Washington D.C. Interesting contrasts between these two latter examples and the former three highlight the multiple nuances of marriage even within this small social geographical space.

The last ethnographic data I present are about a public health official I met and worked with in Farafenni. I also established social ties with him, that went beyond official professional lines. I choose his narratives about how he negotiated his multiple marriages because as a relatively highly educated man, with

¹ I became increasingly close to this household during my fieldwork, eventually marrying one of their lineage members, although he is not a member of this specific household or compound.

western education and powerful government employment, he breaks the stereotypical mould of 'typical African marriages' abounding in some literature (see Parkin and Nyamwaya 1987, Silberschmidt 1999).

6.1 Marriage – definitional problem

Several anthropological studies of marriage in Africa highlight the great difficulty of adequately formulating a universal cross-cultural and standard definition of marriage as a concept (Blum 1989, Leach 1955, Gough 1968, Mbiti 1969, Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950, Fox 1967, Mair 1969, Phillips 1953, Tew 1951, Beattie 1965, Bohannan and Middleton 1968, Evans-Pritchard 1950). This is particularly because different systems, traditions and societies have diverse ways for establishing social recognition and legitimacy of marriage. Different societies have differing notions about the fundamental reality of marriage, for example whether a man obtains *genetricem* or *uxorem* rights to a woman (Clignet 1970). There is a wide range of values and goals which societies can attach to the marriage relationship, but which are not shared by other societies.

From the classical literature about marriage in Africa, the long list of diverse components that are crucial to the meaning of marriage includes legitimating children (e.g. Leach 1955), cohabitation between the marital partners (Mbailu 1988), ritual recognition, definition of sexual rights, stipulation of domestic services, economic services (Gough 1968), consent exchange between the spouses, exchange of bride-wealth between the kinsmen of the spouses (Blum 1989), minimum age of consent, etc. In fact the heterogeneity of marriage forms and practices in Africa permeates through a systematic compilation of classifications of marriage contained within relevant literature, including polygyny (Tertilt 2003, Sanderson 2001, Pebley et al. 1988, Jacoby 1995, White and Burton 1988, Goody 1973, Ezech 1997, Ember 1974, Ware 1979, Timaeus and Reynar 1998, Strassmann 1997, Anderson 2000), polyandry (Tew 1951, Leach 1955, Clignet 1970, Levine and Sangree 1980), polygamy (Delius and Glaser 2003, Moller and Welch 1990, Hale 1995, Dorjahn 1988, Martens 2003, Hillman 1975, Welch and Glick 1981, Hayase and Liaw 1997, Doodoo 1998), monogamy (Schoellman and Tertilt 2006, Blum 1989), women marriages (Njambi and

O'Brien 2000, Greene 1998, Bledsoe 1980, Amadiume 1987, Clark 1994), same-sex marriages (Murray and Roscoe 2001, Teunis 2001, Migraine-George 2003, Epprecht 2002, Pincheon 2000, Gevisser and Cameron 1995), cohabitation (Mokomane 2005, Da Costa 1992, Hattori and Dodoo 2006, Vubo 2005, Parkin 1966), concubinage (Uchendu 1965), group marriages (Gough 1968), levirate (Beswick 2001, Malungo 1999, 2001, Akpera 1997), sororate (Pans 1989), widow inheritance (Luke 2002, Kirwen 1976, Pauw 1990, Obbo 1976), child betrothals (Nour 2006, UNICEF 2005, Bruce and Clark 2003, Mikhail 2002, Meekers 1992), arranged marriages (Griffiths 1997), informal marriages (Blum 1989, Parkin and Nyamwaya 1987).

Major criticisms of earlier attempts at defining the concept of marriage within the African contexts include the assertion that outsiders have often come up with ethnocentric definitions that are biased by their moral, religious, philosophical and/ or cultural backgrounds (see Blum 1989). Because of emic - etic differences some published defined boundaries of marriage have no resonance with the lay appreciations and performances of marriage. A local from the area of study would have no clue what the written interpretation was about. Furthermore as discussed by McCombie (2003), many concepts related to sexuality often have no direct translation into English and beg for a more nuanced discussion which can be lost to foreigners attempting to capture the diverse attached local meanings in English.

Therefore rather than beginning this chapter with my own conceptual definition of marriage, I prefer to examine the emic meanings, nuances and underlying notions within the enactments, processes and lived realities of my study participants. Based on their lay explanations, I collected context-specific enactments and definitions of marriage; grounded in local realities of Gambians.

'Some societies do not consider it proper for a woman of marriageable age, or even of any age, to lack a male guardian. In traditional societies, a girl was practically always under the authority of a man: first her father or his surrogate, and then her husband or his substitute. In fact, traditional marriage, usually, included the transfer of the father's authority over his daughter to the husband.' Blum (1989:110)

6.2 Marriage is about the lineage, kinship and society

Figure 6.1 A Fula bride on arrival at her husband's village



Social organisation in contemporary The Gambia is still hinged upon patrilineal arrangements as prescribed in the different ethnic sub-divisions. Among the Wollof, Mandinka, Fula, Serer, Jola, Karoninka, Serahule, and Aku, the lineages are organised around male household heads. Thus belonging and family relationships are both founded on the relationships to the male household head – who is usually the father. The home belongs to the father, and in his absence the older sons, or in some cases to the father's brother. Paternal descent is more socially valued than maternal descent. Children belong to the father's lineage. They are named after and by the father's kinsmen. Household assets are mainly owned by male agnates. It is the gender responsibility of the adult male(s) to provide for the members of the compound generally, and the household specifically.

Marriage is mostly contracted between two families: the bride's and the groom's. Rather than solely fulfilling the needs of the individual, marriage is often about meeting membership responsibilities to the

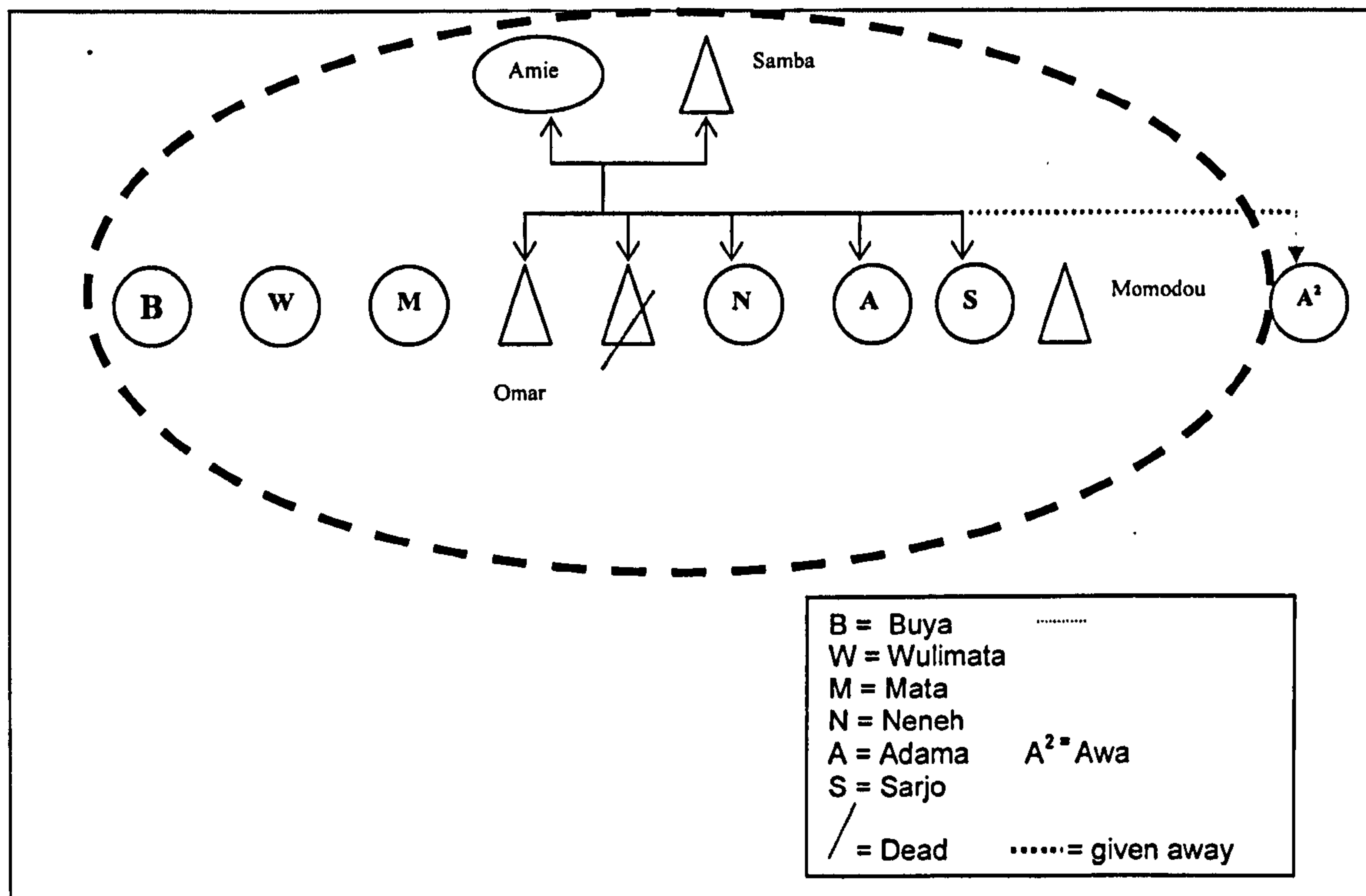
lineage, wider kin-group, and society. The members of these units of societal organisation participate to varying degrees in the processes of contracting a marriage for their members, including choosing the partner(s), initiating the relationship, facilitating the negotiations for bride-price or dowry, determining the form of marriage – whether traditional or Islamic or civil, etc. The kinsmen also monitor and reward the productivity of the marital couple in terms of reproduction of children, social production of social status, financial production of wealth or the multiplication of the factors of production. Marriage is virilocal, whereby the wife leaves her parents' residence and moves into her husband's residential space.

6.2.1 The girls in Amie's household

When I first met the members of Amie's household in the initial phases of my fieldwork, it comprised Amie, her first husband Samba Sowe, their son Omar, Samba's nephew Momodou Sowe, three of Amie's biological daughters namely Neneh, Adama – whose twin-sister Awa had been given² to a close friend of Amie who has no children of her own, Sarjo, as well as three female teenagers called Buya, Mata and Wulimata. They all lived in a two-roomed house; with Omar sleeping in the smaller outer room which also acted as storage space, Amie, Samba and their younger children sleeping on the large wooden bed that occupied three quarters of the main room, and the three teenagers would sleep on colourful mats locally called *basang* and spread on the floor after creating space by piling the green plastic chairs one on top of the other and pushing the small centre table as close to the door as possible. Momodou later rented a small room in a compound not far from Amie's, although he ate his meals and spent most of his time away from work in Amie's household.

² In the study setting, it was a common custom to 'give away children' to other relatives or friends (Sommerfelt 1999, Nyanzi, Manneh and Walraven 2006, Jassey and Nyanzi 2007).

Figure 6.2 Amie Bah's household – September 2003



6.2.1.1 Hardworking Buya

Buya Sowe (19) was always engaged in some housework chore whenever I went over to Amie Bah's compound. Sweeping the sandy courtyard, mopping the rough cement house-floors, pounding cous-cous in the big wooden mortar, sorting rice, de-scaling fish, peeling potatoes, cooking, washing up dishes and cooking utensils, bathing the younger children at the tap in the front of the courtyard, returning from the market sometimes with a new gas-bottle on her head, sometimes with a multi-coloured plastic bucket of freshly purchased foodstuffs, washing big pans of clothes, folding and pressing them with the charcoal iron-box. A quiet but vibrant, chocolate skinned, big-busted young Fula woman, Buya never ceased to amaze me by her seeming ceaseless energy.

When I first needed to plait my hair in long-lasting corn-rows, I talked with Amie.

‘Buya will do it nicely for you,’ she replied.

‘Ah, you mean your daughter that I found working in your compound?’ I asked.

‘Yes, that one. When she returns from her job, she will do your hair nicely for you.’

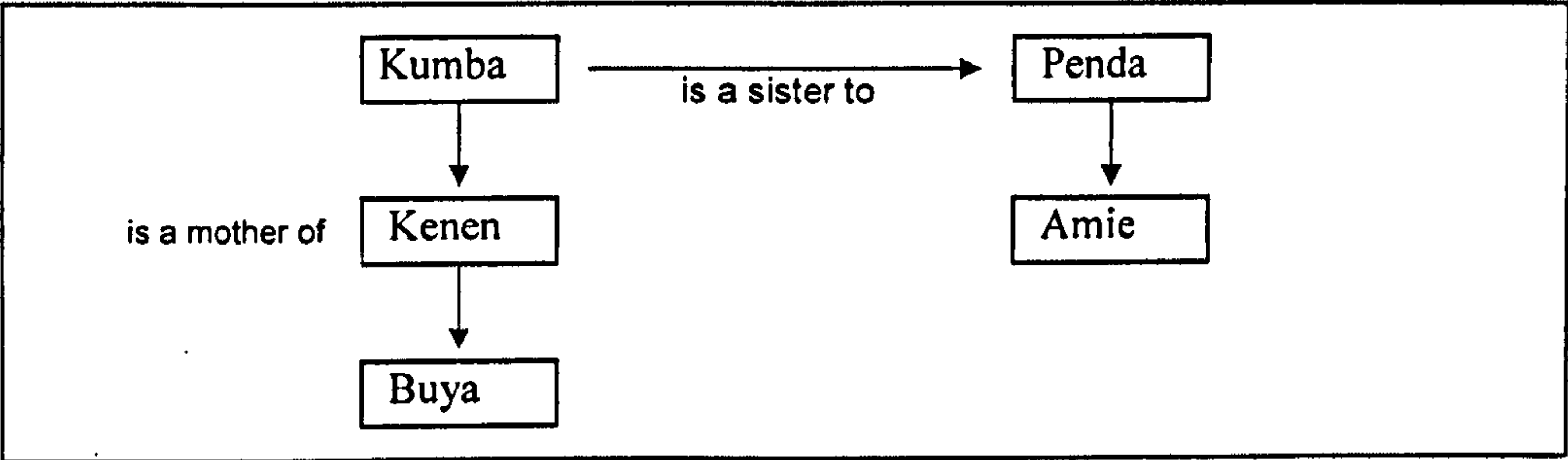
Thus in April 2003, I begun a relationship initially based on hair-plaiting with Buya. She also occasionally treated my feet and hands to *fudan* – a beautifully-patterned colour tinting with a concoction made from henna, long-lasting dye powder locally called *No Fly* in Wollof, and water. And although Amie insisted against financial payments, I always gave Buya some money for her services, as I knew other local women to do the same in such circumstances.

Although there were two other female teenagers – Mata and Wulimata aged 17 and 16 years respectively, Buya was evidently the most hardworking in Amie’s household. My early observations confirmed that each of these young women left Amie’s compound early in the morning before the younger children went to school, and variously returned in the early afternoon. I later learnt that they worked as non-resident housemaids in nearby households.

Amie Bah referred to all the young people in her household as her children, treating them similar to her own biological children. I later learnt that each of the above three teenage youths were differently ‘given’ to Amie by her relatives. This was after she had long settled into her marriage to Samba Sowe, an itinerant fishmonger-cum-truck driver. The first girl – Buya, was given to her shortly after Amie had shifted from her mother-in-law’s compound in the rural provinces, to a two-roomed house in a booming tourist area.

Thus Buya is a daughter to Kenen, whose mother (Kumba) was an elder sister to Penda – Amie’s mother.

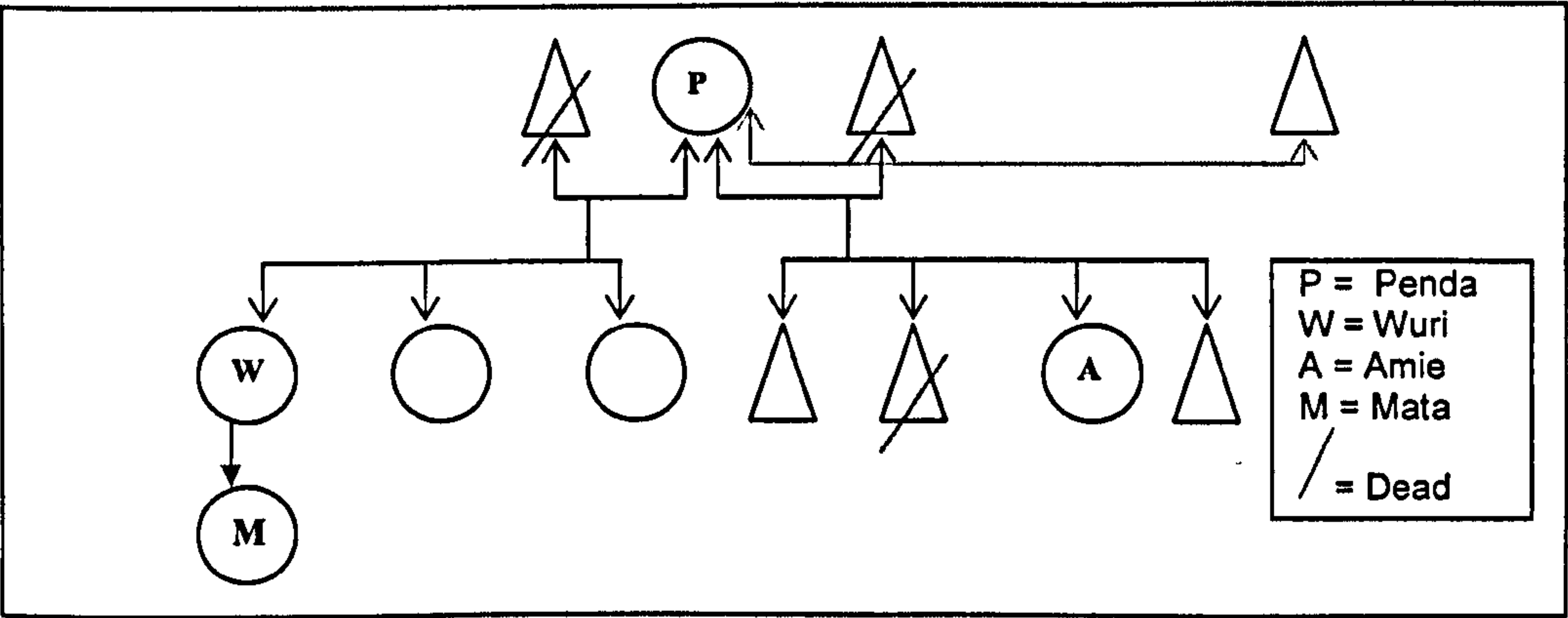
Figure 6.3 Buya's relationship to Amie



6.2.1.2 Beautiful Mata

And Mata is a daughter to Wuri, Amie’s eldest maternal-step-sister³ with whom they share a biological mother but different fathers.

Figure 6.4 showing the relationship between Amie and Mata



For Mata, it was her amazing beauty that struck me when I first met her. Large brown eyes with ever-long lashes, a small slightly pouting mouth, a wasp-like waist that was often exposed by her stylish Western evening clothes or hipster Britney-Spears-like jeans sold in the daily market of imported second-hand clothes, very graceful limbs, the most delicate-looking neck and a full-sized behind that she adolescently swayed to and from when she moved – particularly when she wanted to make an impression.

³ This is a step-sister with whom they share the same mother but different fathers (see appendix 9).

Unknown to me then, Mata also had one of the foulest tempers, was sporadically given to sulking about both issues and non-issues and also a challenging handful for Amie to manage. I was often called to Amie's compound to 'talk some sense' into Mata, when her Aunt found her impish tantrums impossible to cope with.

Mata was also very popular with the neighbourhood boys and young men, whom I often found chatting with her at the shops, on the *bantaba* benches, in the many youths' *voos*⁴, or during the social programs where dancing, festivity, stylish dressing and fun reigned. She loved to dance. Mata variously coached me in the popular Senegambian dance styles including *gerrgete*, *chossane*, *ndaga*, *mbalax* before we went out for an evening program. Although we planned to once attend a Youssuor Ndour⁵ concert together, we mainly danced at home to a Sanyo radio cassette player playing pirated tapes of music, sold by hawkers, along the streets and in the shops of Serrekunda or Banjul. These casual but thorough dance-lessons were vital for me in order to quickly and successfully catch-up with the latest popular dance trends in that part of the world's youth social life. The dances came in mighty handy when I had to hang out in the clubs, on the beaches, at youth forums and even official public functions like the opening dance at the youth workers and policymakers' dinner organised by the National Youth Council. Not to appear brazenly local, Mata even sometimes honoured me with presentations of salsa, hip-hop, reggae and zouk which she danced together with Momodou Sowe, a resident nephew of Amie Bah's husband.

For my ethnographic purposes, Mata was an excellent informer. From her, I fed my hunger to know about who was doing what with who and when and where and sometimes even why. She was always one of my initial sources of local gossip. Also, I found her a particularly good point of contact for a certain class of youths: school-drop outs who used social mechanisms other than education to better their status among peers and in the community. Mata's dress sense steadily became more up-beat during the time I was in the field. Even though she was the youngest of the three teenage girls in Amie's household, she delighted in

⁴ Mainly an urban space which is a loosely-established meeting place for youths, often at the corner of two streets.

⁵ A popular Senegalese musician whose songs, music and dances are household favourites especially consumed in moments of leisurely relaxation, at festivities, or organised youthful events. His staged performances attracted large local audiences, mainly comprising of urban youths, adults or rural income-earners (see <http://www.youssou.com>).

dressing up and wearing make-up in the evenings, much more than the older girls and her Aunt. When I did not consult Amie about choosing dress-designs, or buying fabric or even which tailor to take my pieces of cloth to, it was to Mata that I turned.

6.2.1.3 Wulimata who loves children

Wulimata is a grandchild of sorts to Amie. As illustrated in figure 6.5 below, Wulimata is a daughter to Gili who is a daughter to Wuri who is a maternal-step-sister to Amie.

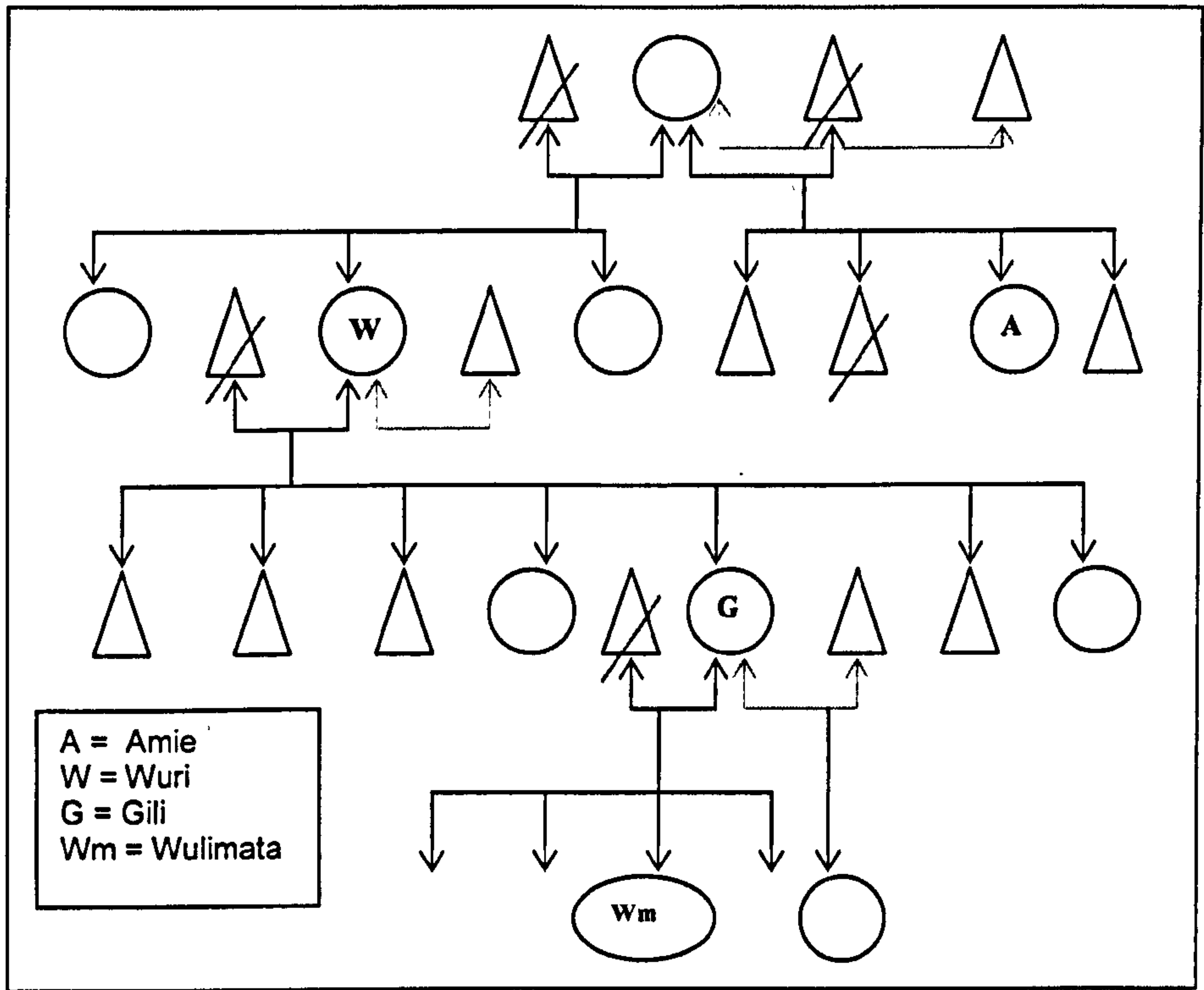
Unlike Buya and Mata, Wulimata's third generation genealogical distance from Amie socially entitled her to a 'joking relationship' as scripted in Fula culture. McLaughlin (1995), Bellagamba (2006) discuss different sorts of joking relationships among the Fula, including that specified between grandparents and their grandchildren. Therefore Wulimata was the one who often raised tricky subjects to Amie, or brought up requests for special treats that the other children in the household would all enjoy. Wulimata was said to be good with children.

'Although she puts too much pepper in the fish-soup,' Amie often complained to me when Wulimata took over the cooking because Buya was in her periods⁶, 'she is also very good with children.'

Another time Wulimata's employer came over to Amie's compound to beg Amie to persuade her grand-daughter to reconsider her threat to leave the employment as a maid. 'She is the best maid I have ever had who can look after children. All my children like her. What will I do if she leaves? I am willing to increase her payment, if only she can give me a few more months as I look around for another girl. Maybe she will teach the new girl to look after the children, and then she can leave to prepare for her marriage,' I over-heard the wealthy-looking bejewelled and heavily-scented Mauritanian woman implore.

⁶ Menstruation is polluting to women, according to Islamic ethos (for a discussion see chapter 6).

Figure 6.5 showing the relationship between Amie and Wulimata



Also, I variously noticed Wulimata joking, playing about and cordially interacting with children much younger than herself. So I utilised her services as a child-minder for a few weeks when I had to travel back to London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine; which trip necessitated that I leave my daughter behind in the field with my mother who had come to visit.

6.2.2 My impressions of their premarital sexualisations

During my early visits, it became quite evident that Buya was not interested in a sexual relationship with any of the local boys. Mata, on the other hand, had several male friendships, some of which could have involved clandestine sexual encounters. Wulimata was in the early stages of getting emotionally involved with a Fula man who was visiting his migrant brother – a shopkeeper from Guinea Bissau. In the evenings, after everyone had completed their day’s work, taken their evening bath and changed into pretty clothes –

as is the daily custom, I often hung out with these young people in their compound. Sometimes it was just the members of Amie's household and I. Often, some other teenage girls and women from the renting households in the compound would join our *bantaba* with their mats or stools. Or indeed, we would sometimes have some of the ladies from the neighbouring compounds coming to visit us. Basically, there was no fixed format to what we actually did. Sometimes we would chat, listen to music, play cards or Ludo or 'Snakes and Ladders', buy *ebbeh* – a spicy dish made of crab, cassava, lime-juice, palm oil, dry fish, tamarind seeds locally called *dagkar*, and special spices. On specific days, we would crowd around Amie's black and white television set, watching endlessly repeated popular soaps or local drama. If one of the wealthier male members of the compound were around, or if indeed a visitor (usually male) chanced the household, we would all sit around a small charcoal-stove brewing the highly addictive *attaya*. Sometimes a group of us would jointly un-plait the braids of one of the girls. Or we would sit around Buya plaiting a customer. As discussed in chapter 2, these evening chat groups exemplify some of the locally available avenues I could easily tap into, become a member of, and access insider 'cultural' information. Chat groups of varying format and composition became one of the routine and established avenues from which I garnered my day-to-day observations and notes.

With hindsight, I realise that the pattern of who missed these usually all-female evening chat groups was interesting in relation to their sexualisation processes. When Wulimata got serious with her boyfriend from Guinea Bissau, she temporarily disappeared from the evening chats with the rest of us. She would dress-up earlier than usual, go stand by the roadside where the young man would come and meet her. Then they would go off for a while, presumably to the migrant brother's shop. I once asked Amie about these disappearances of her grand-daughter, and she assured me that she trusted the older brother who is a devout Muslim and who would never allow his younger brother to fornicate in his compound. She confided in me that it was a 'safe relationship' implying that theirs was a platonic relationship in her interpretation. Unfortunately for Wulimata, her boyfriend 'suddenly' had to leave for his home-country. Sadly enough, he never said farewell to her, prematurely terminating their three-month affair in an unfair manner that left the

young lady in tears and heartbroken for a whole month. She resumed our evening chat group, swearing never again to talk with any man.

Mata was more communal in her interactions with her boyfriends and lovers. During the first three years of my fieldwork which were prior to her eventual marriage, Mata had a string of four 'steady' boyfriends in succession. There was a recognizable pattern to her absences from the evening chat groups. Early in the relationships and when passion was high, she tended to meet these young men in private: they would pick her up from home, take her to their compound or to a night programme or to buy roast meat called *Afra*, and then they would bring her back to the compound late into the night when many of us were either asleep on the *bantaba* mats or after we had each dispersed to our own homes and beds. Later when the relationship was normalised, love steam was running low or particularly when she had had a quarrel - like the time when she received a severe thrashing from Juma her lover who also trained in taekwondo - she would return to the chat group and openly discuss, criticise, ridicule or praise her sexual partner at the time. 'I'm bored with him,' she would say.

Or, 'I really hope he does not come looking for me today because he is just wasting my time. He does not want marriage.'

The story that generated most criticism from her pretty lips, as she expressively rolled her big beautiful eyes, was about Juma. She kept the chat group discussion lively, entertained and sympathising for many evenings in succession.

'He beat me up because he believed the lies that Momodou told him about me cheating on him with another man. Look!' She exclaimed as she lifted her cotton blouse to expose a badly bruised back. 'That ugly Wollof man with small legs slapped me when I started to deny and tried to explain to him. I tried to fight him back, but he kicked me on the chest and I fell down onto his bed. Then he beat me all over. I was shouting for help, so he covered my mouth with his ugly hands. He continued to beat me. I hate him. Oh I hate him.'

For Mata, always after the initial passion of a new sexual relationship, her boyfriends would just join us as we chatted. They often spent their money on the entire chat group, buying us *attaya*, flavoured

drink-powder, ice-blocks, *ebbe*, or *chagree* - a favourite Fula drink made of sour milk, treated cous-cous, fruit-scented flavour and sugar.

One day in September 2004, Buya showed me a photograph of a bearded young man dressed in dark plastic goggles, a yellow tee-shirt, a pair of blue denims and white sneakers. He was leaning against a taxi-door. In his left hand, he held a small black walkman from which led a thin cord connected to large round earphone sponges that covered his entire ears. He was chic. He was handsome. And she said that she loved him. She was shy; her eyes avoiding mine when she talked about him. I was very glad for her and assured her that I would pray he was a good man to her. She asked me to pray that he got some money quickly because he had told her that he wanted to marry her. I was touched that she should hold me in her confidence. I was also delighted that she had found new love.

As her love for him developed, I watched a slow but steady transformation in Buya's vibrant person. She began to take extra care of her body, her dress style and her personal presentation. She joined Wulimata and Mata in applying bleaching creams on their faces (see chapter 4 for a discussion about lay notions of beauty, sensuality, the erotic body and fashion where I examine the local meanings attached to skin texture and complexion). No longer satisfied with her clothes made from African fabric in Senegambian style, Buya also started selecting choice dresses of Western style from the daily second-hand market. These she matched with gold-plated jewellery bought from street hawkers or open market stalls. She even bought an eye pencil, some bright red lipstick and cheap perfume.

Two things were distinct about Buya when she became erotically aware of this young man. Unlike Mata and Wulimata, she never ever wore trousers. I classified the perceptions of those around towards Buya's chosen dress-code either as representative of her high sense of Islamic propriety for women, or attestation to her 'rural backwardness', or personal ascription to customary Fula ethnic values of feminine decency. Secondly, she did not disappear from the sight and presence of the evening chat group. Instead, she preferred to invite her boyfriend initially to join the group. Later she preferred to separate their two

*togals*⁷ from the general discussion, placing them a few feet away from the group. There, not too far away to be tempted, she would sit and chat with him in the presence of everyone. From my observation, I do not remember Buya ever going off to some place – alone with this man. I often heard Amie and her two brothers admonishing Mata and Wulimata to emulate Buya's example and interact openly with their partners in a healthy pure way.

6.3 Youths are powerless when it comes to marriage

I lived with these three young ladies prior to their becoming sexually active. I also participated in the processes that led to their eventual marriage.

6.3.1 Buya's brothers force an old man on her

After a three months' break from fieldwork, I returned to The Gambia in July 2005 to some shocking news. I had accompanied Ousman to Penda Jallow's home where we met Kenen – Buya's mother. It was my first time to meet Kenen in person. After several introductory salutations and a hearty meal, I volunteered to wash-up the dishes together with Kenen. I found her very agreeable, although she was initially shy about being rural. I assured her that my home in Uganda is also rural. Then we got talking about her daughter – Buya.

'Eh, I am really happy for her to have met that young man,' I said as I spread the plastic mugs onto the sand-covered ground. 'How are their marriage preparations going?'

'It is better for you to use warm water for those fat-covered plates. Let me bring the gas bottle so we can heat up the water,' she replied.

Totally missing her unspoken message to me to drop the subject, I registered in my head to rekindle our conversation with my question when she returned.

'So, what is the progress on Buya's marriage?' I asked when Kenen returned with a bucket of warm water.

⁷ Wollof name for a soft wooden stool.

‘I think that Hamza is a trustworthy man and will make a good husband for Buya,’ I quickly added when Kenen did not immediately respond to my question.

‘Buya will not be marrying with that man,’ she replied uncharacteristically slowly.

I momentarily stopped scrubbing a metallic platter with the soapy sponge in my hands. Looking up from the washing, I fixed my gaze on Kenen. She did not make sense to me. I wanted to understand what she was communicating.

‘She will not be marrying with that man. Her brothers got her another husband from our village. They have agreed with Pa Burom on the bride-price he is to pay. She will be returning to the village to marry him,’ Kenen stated in a matter-of-fact voice.

‘Oh!’ I replied.

I was lost for words. I was shocked. I was immediately angry. I wanted to scream a thousand insults like ‘patriarchs, chauvinists, male pigs, treacherous traders in female human flesh calling themselves brothers, etc’ which would have made sense to my Westernised educated female friends and associates. I felt terribly violated. As a young woman, I felt cheated and let down. Yet it was not for me to react this way. I was not the recipient of this cruel treatment. Buya! I wondered how my friend Buya felt. I was outraged on her behalf. I wanted to stamp my feet up and down in anger. And yet all I did was continue to stare silently at Kenen. I turned my face away from Kenen, bent back over the dirty dishes and wondered how long female oppression by scheming patriarchs fashioned as brothers and husbands-to-be would continue to thrive. I wondered about Buya’s right to choice. Here, I came face-to-face with deep violation of another African youth’s personhood.

Wasn’t it a right stemming from one’s humanness to choose whom to fall in love with? Was it a privilege to decide who to marry? Was it a luxury for this teenager to cherish and hope in her heart that she could have a say about who she had sex with? Wasn’t it a violation that unknown to Buya, her greedy married brothers had struck a bargain with an elderly man – a Pa⁸, for goodness sake – to give her away in

⁸ Usually a title for an elderly man, a father or father-figure. A child can also be named ‘Pa’ in memory of a predecessor.

marriage? Why the disregard for Buya's love relationship with Hamza? Was it proper for this elderly man of wide repute and deep Islamic piety to intrude upon this young couple's future plans of marriage, their emotional entanglement and their dreams of a life together? Was it really more manly for Hamza to resignedly reject Buya, put aside his love for her in honour of her family's decision? Why was Kenen - Buya's mother in support of this arrangement? Why didn't Amie Bah object? Why didn't Buya rebel? Why was the family conniving to bury Buya's dreams and hopes even before they materialised? And for goodness' sake why was my mouth silent, in the face of this new knowledge?

Furiously, I scrubbed away at the fatty plates, hating the very body in which I was dressed. I revolted against my powerlessness to change Buya's situation. What could I have done, had I been different? Had I been male, I would have requested a hearing with Buya's brothers, or perhaps with her stepfather who had been assigned to her mother when she became widowed, or even to the elderly respectable Pa Burom for whom I felt immense disrespect. But I was a mere woman; an outsider to the Fula culture. I was just a student with a lot of western feminist emancipatory ideals in my head. And I was full of anthropological indoctrination about the importance of respecting cultural values different to mine. I realised I was a powerless feminist and ethnographic researcher with a huge frustration in my head.

'I will talk again with you when Ousman returns from the shops,' I said. 'I think I do not understand because of the difficulty of language⁹.'

'What is there to understand?' Kenen asked me. 'Pa Burom is not a bad man. All his wives are happy people. He is a Fula Tukulor like us. Buya's brothers chose him over that Turuka¹⁰ man whom we are not even very sure about. And besides, Pa Burom is from the same village with us. He is well-established in business, not like that young man who has not yet seen the world.'

Frustrated, I drew deep as if from my belly and spat a whitish blob of spittle on the sand. Though I found this Gambian custom disgusting, I had learnt to do it like everyone else. I used it as an excuse to remain silent, in this instance.

⁹ We had been conversing in Wollof which Kenen spoke fluently, and I had achieved some conversational mastery of.

¹⁰ An ethnic minority group from Senegal.

When Ousman later rejoined us, I explained to him what Kenen had revealed about Buya's new arranged marriage. 'Is it true, or did I misunderstand her?' I asked. 'Is Buya really going to marry this old Pa whom her brothers struck a deal with, instead of Hamza whom she fell in love with because she admired?'

'Yes it's true,' he replied.

'What about Buya?' I asked.

'What about her?' he replied with another question.

'I mean, what does Buya feel about this new arrangement? Surely it was forced upon her! What does she have to say about it?' I unleashed my barrage of questions.

'What can she have to say? Nothing! She can only do what her brothers tell her,' Ousman replied.

'Did she just accept? Didn't she rebel? What about her love for Hamza? Has she ever seen this Pa Burom man? I hear he has many other wives. Doesn't that bother anyone?' I continued in agitation.

'Many times I wonder where your anthropological head is. You see these things in my community all the time, and yet you refuse to accept that it is the way of life for children here to obey their parents' wishes. Why do you question it, yet you say you want to understand our insider view? Why don't you just write it like you see it,' he shot back.

'Ousman, Buya is just a teenager. She is most probably still a virgin. And she loves a different man. The last time I saw her, she was planning to marry another man. You know it as much as I do. Amie Bah – your sister knows it. What is wrong with you people? You are Buya's uncle, Ousman. Why didn't you object to the forced arranged marriage?' I released another arsenal of questions.

'It is not for me to object. These things are not done like that. It is the family who decide.'

'But you can take me to her brothers so I find out why they did what they did. I need to understand how these things are done. I just might write about arranged marriages in my thesis.'

As my research assistant, Ousman took me to Buya's brothers in their village, where I got a chance to interview them about their decision to arrange their younger sister's marriage. As my husband and co-

parent, Ousman scared me by his complicity and attitude of resignation to whatever they had to say or planned to do. Would he handle our daughter's marriage the same way, I wondered.

We visited Buya's family for three days and two nights. During this time, I established the contemporary power of the hold of customary values, cultural practice and belief in precedent as practiced in the Fula family tradition. Though living in this day and age – they had mobile phones, one was wearing Levi Strauss jeans while on the farm – Buya's brothers exhibited strong traditional inclinations that influenced their thinking about marriage, kinship, family obligations, gender roles, women's social posture in relation to men, etc.

At the outset of our interaction which was heavily mediated by Ousman's cross-translations, I explained to them that I was writing a book about marriage of Gambian youths, and that I was interested in describing the varieties of marriage processes. The reason I had come to visit was because I was aware that they were organising Buya's marriage to Pa Burom. I did not initially disclose to them my knowledge of Buya's love relationship with Hamza. They were interested that I chose to include them in the book, invited me to attend the wedding and even posed for me to take their photographs. It was a fruitful visit.

I confirmed that Buya's father died in 1999. As her elder brothers, both Demba and Gallo had the prerogative to make decisions about her including who, when, how, where and why she married.

'We are Fula. And we Fulas, we mainly marry other Fula. The big families trace the bloodline such that the men can only marry girls from certain families,' Demba said.

'Yes. And we have caste systems. There are people like iron-workers, fishermen, griots, you see? Some of these castes can never marry each other. It is a curse on the marriage. Only bad things can happen in such a marriage. That is why we have to be careful to choose the right man for Buya,' Gallo added.

'You cannot see your cow going to drink poisoned water and you allow it. You must drive it away, and push it to the proper drinking pan,' Demba continued.

They claimed that they were acting in Buya's best interest. Later at night in the solitude of my bed, I ruminated over their cultural logic and arguments. I began to see how some things fell into place. A few others did not add up.

The following day as Demba and Gallo led us on a tour of their village, I countered their earlier claim. 'Yesterday, you were explaining to me about the Fula caste system and how it is important to decisions about marriage partners. But then the man that Buya wanted to marry is not even Fula. Your point does not explain why you think he is not the right man for her,' I stated.

'Aminata, those men from different tribes are the most dangerous. The people who do not practice caste separations are deadly because you find a family that has different children doing different trades. They are mixed up. They do not know what they are. And yet their original ancestors had a caste system. So you will find that a griot's son will marry with a metal-worker's daughter who does not know what their caste is meant to be. They will have plenty of problems in their life. Their marriage will be full of strife and even fights. Their children will be falling sick and dying and coming last in school. They will have losses in business. Even the woman's womb may dry up and refuse to get children. All because of the curses of marrying into a forbidden caste. But then the man did not know because his tribe do not know those things. That was among the problems of Hamza'. Refer to Gamble 1992, Sommerfelt 1999 for some discussion about the caste system and its relevance for contemporary society in The Gambia.

On our last day of the visit, Ousman and I asked if we could visit Pa Burom's compound since he was from the same village.

'We could take you to his compound, but you will not be able to speak with him because he went to his job in Senegal. You see, he began a business there. So that is where he will take Buya to live after the marriage ceremony. That is why he needs another wife to look after him when he is working there. He is a big business man.'

'I see. Buya will be rich,' I replied.

'*Insha Allah!* Only God knows about our future. If he wills, we say Amin.'

When I next went to Amie Bah's compound, word of our visit to Buya's family had preceded me. Amie Bah advised me not to pursue the topic much further. I would only be tickling a dead horse. Amie Bah also divulged Buya's helplessness to change her fate.

‘Buya will get over Hamza,’ she replied to my questions of concern about the girl’s choices. ‘With time she will be glad about Pa Burom.’

‘Can’t you help Amie Bah?’ I asked. ‘After all you have been taking care of Buya for the last ten years.’

‘I have learnt that I cannot interfere in such situations. I am only a woman. Maybe if Buya was my brother’s daughter, it would be easier. But I am her maternal relative, which makes me insignificant to change things here,’ she explained.

A few days later, Ousman and I met Hamza. I explained to him that I was interested in writing about Buya’s experiences. He agreed to be interviewed on condition that I changed his name and removed all potentially identifying information from the write-up. He confirmed that he had really loved Buya, proposed to her and was planning marriage. What I hadn’t known until this meeting, was that he was already a husband to his uncle’s daughter who had bore him two girls. Hamza was married to his cousin. Buya would have been his second wife, had she married him.

His predicament at the time of his relationship with Buya was hinged upon his dependence on his uncle for almost everything. Hamza had been raised by this uncle since he was six. He lived in his uncle’s compound. His uncle had fixed him into employment at a small restaurant in the trading centre. When Hamza had turned twenty-five years of age, his uncle had given him his daughter to marry.

‘Even though I loved Buya very much, it was not possible for me to marry her immediately as my second wife because it would mean that I would have to bring her into my uncle’s compound to live together with me, my wife, our children, my uncle and his household. It would have been a tough challenge for Buya. So I had told her to wait until I raised enough money to build my own compound where I could take her. Because she loved me very well, she was willing to wait. But that was when her brothers found her another man to marry her. I do not hate her. I pray for her to be well.’

6.3.2 Marriage as a means of control of foul sexuality

'You see Aminata, here in Africa it is not easy to be a woman and decide who to marry with,' Amie said as she continued to separate carrots, onions, hibiscus buds, egg plants, portions of pumpkins, bitter tomatoes and Irish potatoes. We were in the middle of a cooking lesson on the veranda in front of her house.

'Yeah?' I asked, to encourage her on. Earlier on in my fieldwork, I had established that when people tended to essentialise about 'Africa' or 'Africans' or 'Gambians', it was a signifier for me to concentrate because I was in the process of receiving 'insider' information about 'typical' or often reified cultural practice. As fore-mentioned in my exploration of the different reasons for participants assigning me an identity either closer to or further away from themselves (see chapter 1), on this occasion I suspected that Amie was about to occupy me with another exposition on 'being an African woman'.

'Like for me, I never knew this Samba Sowe you see here, my husband. He is my husband now for sixteen years but I saw him for the first time on the day of the marriage ceremony. It was my big brothers, my mother and her relatives who found him for me,' she said.

'How old were you?' I asked.

'I was a young girl. Maybe fifteen or sixteen years,' she replied.

'But weren't you going to school then?' I asked.

'I was schooling. You see my bigger brothers were jealous of me. They said I was difficult to manage. So they sent me to my Aunt's home for the holidays. I was living with Kumba, the mother of Kenen. And Samba's sister is married in that village where I spent my holidays. She saw me and she told my aunt that she wanted me to become a wife for her brother. My Aunt told my mother who consented at that time because she had been getting all these bad reports about me from my bigger brothers. So they took some pictures of me and they sent them to Samba without my knowledge. He accepted that he also wants me to be his wife. And then when I returned home after school had started, they sent me some pictures of Samba,

saying that he wants me to be his wife. I was very upset. I tore each and everyone of those pictures. I did not have any love for this man Samba,' Amie said.

'Did you tell your family that you did not love Samba?' I asked.

'My brothers did not care about anything at that time. They just wanted me to marry because they said that I was a bad girl and that I was getting spoilt,' she replied.

'Yeah? Why?' I asked as I peeled the potatoes. 'Why did they think that you were a bad girl?'

'You see Aminata, I was in love with another man who was selling in Brikama town. He was a successful businessman. He was a Wollof from a strong family. His name was Husseinu Gaye. Sometimes after school, he would come and pick me up in his car and he would take me to have a good time. I always went with my good friend Mariama Keita who also had a boyfriend. But my brothers said that Mariama was a bad girl who was just spoiling me because she was exposed to the world as a sports-woman.'

'So where would you go?' I asked?

'Sometimes to a program like watching football or some musicians performing somewhere, sometimes to a video-showroom, or just to eat in a restaurant. And sometimes just for chatting alone with him. Sometimes we went to the nightclub called Jokor. It is the nightclub which made my brothers angry with me. They said I was shaming them and behaving badly as if I was not a Muslim from a strong Muslim home. But going to a nightclub does not make me a bad woman, Aminata,' Amie justified herself to me.

'That is true,' I quickly agreed. 'I enjoy going to nightclubs. So, how did your brothers know about what you were doing?' I asked.

'Jealousy! It was those boys at my school who were feeling bad because I refused all of them. Don't you see how I am brown, Aminata? And in those days I had very long hair up to here – falling on my back. So everybody would call me *Amie-Toubab*, *Amie-Toubab*. And my uniform was always clean and neat. When my father was living, I ate very well and I looked good. And all those boys at school were disturbing me. So they reported me to my big brothers, saying that I was going off with bad girls and men instead of being steady on my books. My brothers were very angry. When I went home late one day after school, it was a terrible day for me. They were all sitting in the courtyard, waiting for me. When I said, "*Salaam Aleikum*"

to them, they did not answer me. Instead they asked me why I was late. I explained to them that the last class ended late. But they said that I was telling lies¹¹. And they accused me of being with my Wollof man. I denied. They told me to stop seeing him. And then they told me everything. That I am a bad girl, loving this man and that one, just wasting our dead father's money which they used to pay my school fees, that I had bad friends, that I was a shame to the family name, and so on. I tried to explain and defend myself from their accusations. They pushed me down onto the ground and beat me. They beat me and kicked me. I was shouting and rolling on the ground like a mad woman. Afterwards they cut off my hair. My whole head was shaved of all its hair. And then they locked me up in the chicken store without any food or water.'

'It sounds horrible,' I said.

'Aminata it was a bad moment in my life. It was one of the worst shames for me. I did not return to school because of shame because people had heard the story of what happened to me. And then I was afraid of other students seeing my head without hair. I stayed at home doing housework and saying my prayers. After a few weeks, my mother told me that I should prepare myself for a long journey because I was going to get married,' Amie narrated.

'Just like that?' I asked.

'Yes. I have never forgotten the misery of those days. When all those things happened to me, my mother told my bigger brothers about the proposal of Samba to marry me. It was a solution to their problem otherwise they feared that if I stayed in my father's compound, I would shame the family by getting pregnant before marriage. The choice of Samba was perfect for them. You see, his family like ours, was originally from Futa Jeeri near Salo. He is a Fula Kabobeh like us.'

'But Amie, couldn't you refuse to marry him?' I asked.

'I did not love him, but it is difficult to challenge the family when they decide about marriage for you. We had to travel to my father's compound nearer to Samba's people in order to prepare for the marriage ceremony. While there, I ran away twice because I did not want to marry with Samba. The first time my

¹¹ I learnt early in my fieldwork that referring to one as *fen* - a liar is one of the worst offences in The Gambia.

brothers threatened to beat me and they sent me back to the wedding preparations. The second time, they convinced me to stay by bribing me with money and gifts. So I got married to Samba,' Aminata said.

'Ah but you must love him now. After all you have been together for all this time and you have very beautiful bright children,' I said.

'It is not very easy Aminata. But I thank God. You see, I was suffering a lot in the first years of my marriage with Samba. He did not take me to his home in town. No. Instead he dumped me in a small Fula hamlet near the Gambia-Senegal border. He left me there with his mother, his younger siblings and some of his younger brothers' children and wives. Imagine the shock to my life. You know how big and modern our family house in Brikama is. In my father's compound we had servants and everything was provided. All I had to do was to study and say my prayers. But in Samba's mother's compound, I had to dig a big garden from here to there, plant food, weed the garden, harvest, and then start the cycle of work again. I had to carry water in a big pan from a spring well far from the compound. Yet there were paid men to carry water to our family compound when the taps ran out. I had to chop firewood or pick twigs from the bushes. Everyday in that woman's compound, cooking was with firewood. They do not know about these gas bottles like the ones we have here. I worked and worked and worked. Even on Fridays before the *Juma* prayers, I had to go to the garden and dig. For me I did not know such labouring before my marriage with Samba. So one day I ran away and returned to my home in Brikama. Do you know what those men – my big brothers did?' she asked.

'No, I don't know,' I replied. 'What did your brothers do?'

'They drove me away. They sent me back to Samba, claiming that I am a married woman and I should endure the small hardships in my marriage so that my husband will pray to God to bless my children. Even my own mother, told me to go back to Samba. I cried and pleaded with her. But she told me that I had to go back. So what could I do, Aminata? What could I do?' Amie asked me again.

'Well..., I am not sure,' I replied, definitely at a loss for a more feminist and liberating answer.

'I ran away from Samba's mother's compound two times. And each of those times I went home to Brikama, my family drove me back to my marital home.'

‘What would Samba do when you returned?’ I asked.

‘Was he even around? He maintained a house in the town where he never took me for a long time. I suspect that he kept changing women in that house. For me, he had agreed to marry me so that I could look after his widowed mother, helping her with the housework chores and also bearing her grandchildren. He only came to me once in a long while. I hated him so much in those first years that I preferred him to stay away from us. After the second time, I stopped running away to Brikama. I decided to stay in my new home and become strong. But people think that Samba and his people went to a Fula marabout who made strong love *jujus* called *Nope* to make me stay fixed on Samba – not looking at this man or that one but just loving Samba even when he does something bad to me,’ Aminata said.

‘Do you agree that they did this to you?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know,’ she replied. ‘Maybe they did. Maybe they did not. But I think so they did because it is the only thing which makes sense when I think about how I stayed with Samba even when I knew that he was having other women on the side whom he was not married with. The Fula *jujus* for love are very strong. You cannot break their power over your mind once they take it. Only another more powerful Fula can break this hold.

The spicy scent of *benechin* wafted in and out of my nostrils as the rice began boiling. Amie rose from her short stool, picked up a cane-broom and started to vigorously sweep the food droppings and waste into a pile on the cement floor.

‘A good African wife must have a strong back and a short broom in her house,’ she said. She broke into hearty laughter. I joined her.

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*Figure 6.6 The facial make-up of a contemporary bride*



Much later, in the confines of my house, my ruminations centred around the complexities inherent within Amie's marriage process. Would it have made a difference if Amie's father was living at the time of her marriage? How is it that Penda Jallow - Amie's mother and her sisters were party to this forced arrangement? How common was the use of photographs as means of introducing potential partners to a man searching for a spouse? Was the girl always unaware of these arrangements? What if Amie was not involved with Husseinu? Would it have made a difference to when, whom and how she got married off? If she loathed Samba so evidently, why did her family persist in arranging the marriage ceremony? Why did Samba marry her, only to take her to his mother's compound? Was this usual? Was it common?

Amie did try to escape, but she was always 'driven back' to her marital home – up to the point that her will to escape was broken. She claims that she eventually **chose** to stay in her mother-in-law's



compound. In juxtaposition, the grapevine had it made out that Samba's people bewitched her with *nope* such that she could never leave Samba; thereby denying any agency on her part. What part did rumours about and fears of *jujus* play in sexual choices? How did it colour her sexual relationships with Samba and her social interactions with his family, her family and their children? I made a note to verify the events of the above narrative by tracing some of the key players in Amie's marriage arrangement and interviewing them about their side of the story.

*Penda Jallow, Amie's mother:*

What Amie says is true. We had to find a man for her marriage. In Islam we are told that marriage is half of the faith. It was a good thing to settle my daughter down at that time because things were getting out of hand. And she was settled for a long time. In fact even Mariama Keita is now settled down as a proper married woman and a mother of some children. But then now I regret all of this because Samba is not a good man. Now they are even talking about having a divorce after all these many years.

*An older paternal step-brother:*

At that time, Amie was not very serious with her education. She was too much into social life, wearing mini-skirts, tight jeans and behaving badly. Don't you see that marriage reformed her? She is now a respectable woman. And Samba has done his best to take care of Amie and her children. They all go to school. She does not work, but then she has a house in the urban centre where life is very expensive. Do you think that she pays the rent herself? No, it is Samba paying for her. We thank God that the marriage worked well.

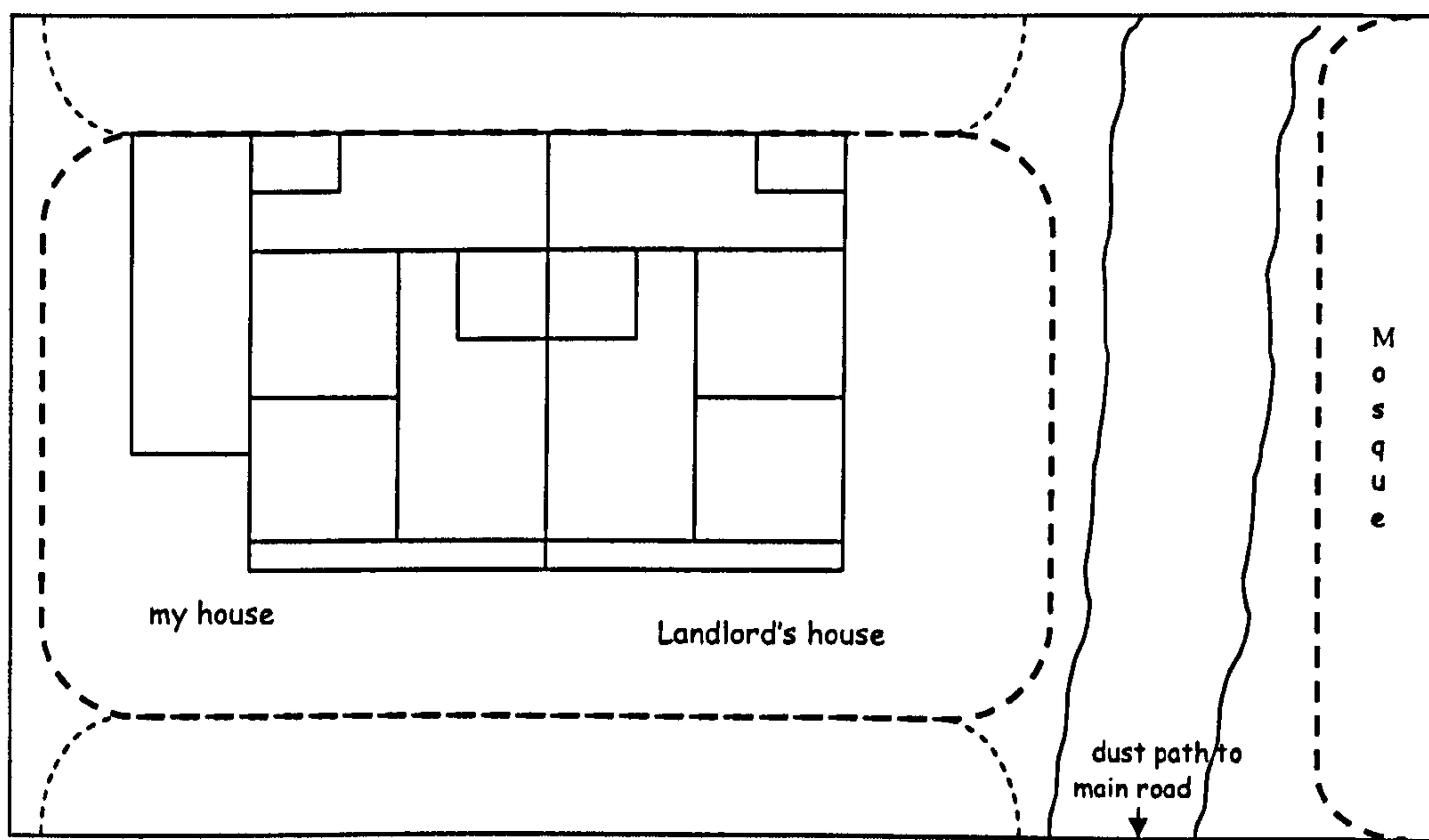
*A younger brother:* I think that

Husseinu was not good enough because they were just two youngsters in love. He had no plans for marriage yet Samba was ready to marry Amie. Also the ethnicity was a problem for Husseinu, we Fulas tend to prefer to marry from the same tribe and clan. And Husseinu was never serious – he was just selling marijuana and using his brother's shop as a base. He did not have any established business to bring in money, yet Samba was a fisherman. I do not know what happened to Husseinu.

### 6.3.3 ‘...girls like goats which you tie on a rope to take to the bush to tie on a tree...’

Makia is fifteen years old. She belongs to the Serahule ethnic tribe. She is the third child of her mother and the eighth child of her father. Her mother is the second wife of Alhagie Pa Tunkara, my landlord in Kotu. A trader in diamonds imported from Sierra Leone, Alhagie Pa Tunkara, struck me as a relatively wealthy man. He owned two Mercedes Benz cars, a Toyota minibus for commercial taxi running the route between Kotu-Kololi and Serekunda Market, and several fruit orchards in the provinces. He also owned several buildings, one of which was the first urban house I rented along the Atlantic Coast.

*Figure 6.7 A map of my house in Kotu*



It is a high-wall-fenced semi-detached house near the local mosque. Pa Alhagie Tunkara's second's wife and her children lived in the wing nearest the gate. And I lived in the adjacent wing: two bedrooms, a large sitting room, a white-tiled bathroom, a flush toilet and a large patio in the front. At the back, I had a small enclosed court yard with a concrete floor, and a small one roomed house which I utilised as the power-house, storing my generator.



Makia was very friendly and outreaching. She often visited our house to chat or borrow a music CD. It was Makia that was always sent to bring a metal bowl of meat or fresh fish or cows' milk, when her mother had received too much to cook for one meal. In the night when we heard Makia's mother screaming in pain from her husband's beating or her father yelling insults, it was Makia that we later asked to explain what was happening.

Makia's story about her planned marriage was first narrated to me in December 2003 by my sister Susan<sup>12</sup>, who was helping me with my research about the sexual relations between Gambian youths and visiting tourists on the coastal beaches near our house (see Nyanzi et al 2005 for a discussion). Apparently Makia was very distressed because her father had directed her mother to talk with her about a 'very good marriage proposal' he had received for Makia from her cousin Sadic who was based in Connecticut, USA. 'What about her studies?' I had asked Susan.

'Well it is complicated,' she replied. 'It sounds like the dad is using her studies as bait for her to give in to this proposal. He has told her that he will not continue paying her school fees unless she agrees to marry this man.'

'So does it mean that the father is happy to pay for her to go to school and yet he is also planning to marry her off before she actually completes school at a grade where she can get a certificate? Where is the profit in that?' I asked.

'No, the father claims that he has told the cousin that he should continue to pay her school fees when he marries her because she is still in school. So it really sounds like a good deal. The bad thing is that the poor girl has never seen this cousin, and does not want to get married right away,' Susan explained.

'Isn't she even a bit lured by the prospect of going to the US?' I asked, because I had been hit hard by the fact that several youths in The Gambia were dreaming of going to Babylon - the West as their only way of making it in life.

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<sup>12</sup> As a top graduate of the Bachelor of Tourism degree, Susan was a practical solution to my need for a research assistant whom I could entrust with coordinating and managing this exploratory study that emerged out of a need to answer questions about the link between tourism, urban youths and sexuality. Early in the fieldwork, I had observed a strong thematic repetition about the role of tourism in the sexual lives of the urban youths we were interviewing. Therefore Susan came down to The Gambia for a year, principally to help with my research.

'Maybe you should ask her these questions to supplement your focus group data about Babylon,' Susan suggested.

That evening I loosely outlined a semi-structured interview for Makia, hoping that she would accept to be tape recorded. Since she lived in the same compound as I did, I reasoned that it was practicable to observe, closely follow and perhaps even participate in Makia's marital processes.

In January 2004, I conducted the first of a series of key informant interviews with Makia. During this interview, I established that she was very studious and had ambitions to become a nurse or midwife when she grew up. She revealed to me that although her exam grades were not the best in her class, she always worked very hard at her studies and had gone as far as organising a reading group with some of the top students in her class so as to facilitate better revision for the tests and exams. I learnt that she was not yet sexually active, although she knew a lot of information about safe sex including condom use, family planning contraceptive methods and how HIV/AIDS is transmitted. She was a member of the Red Cross Society at her school, a club where sexual health education was freely provided to members.

'So, what about your dream partner? What are the qualities you would look for in a man to marry you in future?' I asked. I had been advised to talk in terms of marital partners when asking single youths about potential sexual partners. In an environment where premarital sexual activity is discouraged, it was more culturally appropriate to talk in terms of 'marital partners' than 'sexual partners', because while the latter connoted potential fornication which is socially proscribed against, the former presented sex within socio-culturally accepted frameworks.

'To marry me?' Makia asked.

'Yes, like what qualities do you look for in a future partner?' I explained further.

'Okay, I would like to marry with a doctor. He will be well-educated, and working in a big hospital. This is what I have always wanted because I think that doctors save a lot of lives. They are necessary people who are doing a good job for people's health,' she replied.

'What other qualities?' I asked.

'That's it.'



I was struck that she did not mention physique, or ethnicity or character as the other youths in the study did.

‘How many children would you like to have?’ I asked.

‘That will depend on the will of God. I cannot know that for now,’ Makia answered.

‘And tell me what you think about arranged marriages,’ I said.

‘They are wrong for the girl because she is not given chance to choose whether this man or that man whom she loves. Her parents and their relatives choose for her. That is wrong because even when the girl faces problems with that man she will have to stay there because she does not want to spoil her family. It makes girls like goats which you tie on a rope and you take to the bush to tie on a tree. Even our constitution says they are wrong. I do not know why people do them,’ she said.

This information about the constitution was news to my ears. I made a note to verify it by cross-referring to the constitution of the republic of The Gambia.

‘Are these arranged marriages still happening or are they a thing of the past?’ I asked.

‘Even today as I speak to you there are girls somewhere in this country getting married with men who were chosen for them by their parents. I know it because in my father’s compound in the provinces, we have plenty girls who get married like that. Even in my class, two girls are having arranged marriages this holiday,’ Makia revealed.

Makia did not open up to me in this first interview about her own personal experience with the possibility of a coming arranged marriage. I did not press her. We talked about general occurrences; things that happen to other people. Unlike Susan who had spent a longer period with Makia, I had not yet established rapport and trust.

One day I came home from work in the hot sun. I found Alhagie Pa Tunkara seated on a plastic chair in a shade under a tree, opposite my veranda. He was talking loudly into the phone. His thick hands were gesticulating this way and that as he expressed himself.

‘*Salaam Aleikum*,’ I called out in greeting as I made past him.

‘*Waleikum salaam*,’ he replied. ‘Wait, wait until I hang up. I need to talk with you.’

I patiently stood, and waited.

‘You must stop those interviews with my daughter. I do not want you feeding her with funny ideas about studying for too long. She is getting married to her cousin in America. It is not good for a woman to be alone when she grows up. I think it is better for you to talk to her about life in those outside countries. Tell her what it is like to live in London because America is like London,’ Alhagie Pa Tunkara threw at me.

‘Okay. I will talk to her about life in London. But I also need to continue my interviews with her. You see, we talk about several things which I am researching about for my studies. We talk about reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, where young people get information and health services when they need them,’ I explained.

Our conversation meandered, leaving Makia and touching on my life in Uganda, his travels to Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Gabon. After that day, I was never able to get Makia to participate in another tape-recorded interview.

‘My father refused me to take part in your interviews,’ she told me.

‘Why?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know,’ she said. ‘I told my sister about what we talked about. She told my mother. And I think that my mother must have told my father. They think that you are going to talk to me about women’s human rights.’

In May 2004, Makia stopped attending school. At the end of the month, Sadic arrived from USA. He brought several gifts of clothes, shoes, watches, cell phones and toys to Makia’s family. In June, the two were married at the mosque opposite our house. Makia went to USA with Sadic. While there, she discovered that Sadic was a kitchen porter in a McDonald’s fast food restaurant. Although not the doctor she dreamt of marrying, Makia reported that Sadic earned enough to provide for her needs. Presently as I



write my thesis<sup>13</sup>, she has a toddler and is expecting a baby. Contrary to her father's promises, she never resumed her education.

#### **6.3.4 'Slapped and cheated by my husband in Washington DC!'**

*'It is so natural that at a loss of his wit, or when seemingly he is being over-powered by his wives, the husband gets tempted to use his physical superiority, to rule by force, that is. I remember some disturbing reasoning advanced by one of our teachers when he was punishing a pupil who had not grasped his lesson properly. The teacher argued that he was not beating the pupil but the mistake when, in fact, it was so obvious that the teacher could not, physically or otherwise, beat a mistake; he could only beat the pupil and that was all. This argument is sometimes used by some husbands when they beat their wives. Maillu (1988:118-119)*

Unlike Makia whose report about her marriage to Sadic in Connecticut is relatively successful, Fatou another Gambian youth I met in the first year of my field work, sends me emails of woe as a result of abuse from her Gambian husband. Chic, slender and highly cultured in social grace, Fatou is the daughter of a wealthy businessman who owns many recording studios in the Kombos. Fatou's father is a successful polygynist whose three wives live in the same three-storied house with their multiple children. Fatou's mother (like mine) is the eldest and the first wife.

My first visit to The Gambia in October 2002 coincided with Fatou's marriage ceremony to Yus. Thus I missed the religious rituals and social festivities, which filled three large leather-bound photo albums that I pored over when I later visited. Pictures have that powerful ability to freeze a look, an emotion, an appearance, or motion, in one place. Pictures can relay that which is long past. A beautiful bride. Her symbolic white gown. Her lover's embrace. The glitter in his right eye as he stands besides her and smiles to the camera. The beam of pride on her father's face. The peaceful contentment of her mother who is caught in the act of *swallah* prayer. Merriment, joy and celebration variously expressed by the dancing youths, the communally eating children and the waving bridal couple. Yus and Fatou's wedding was the talk of the town, for a long while after it happened.

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<sup>13</sup> May 2006

Living on the same street in Banjul, Fatou and Yus grew up in the same urban space. Yus, whose father was an Islamic lecturer based in Saudi Arabia, was raised by his paternal uncle who won the lottery and once lived in America. When Yus was studying for his A levels at St. Augustine's High School, he fell madly in love with Fatou who was then in Grade 9 at Academic Missions. He sent his best friend to convince Fatou to begin a love relationship. Fatou rubbished the friend, dispelling the proposal as a joke. One year later, after Yus had completed his studies, he talked with Fatou's elder brother and proposed to marry the sister. He revealed that he would soon be travelling to the United States, but he was deeply in love with Fatou. It was Fatou's brother who slowly but steadily persuaded her to accept Yus' marriage proposal.

The marriage was 'tied' in Yus' absence. His best friend captured the entire ceremony on video. Different key kinsmen paused for video camera and gave tips of counsel to the absent bride-groom. Fatou then left her parent's house and went to live with Yus' family. She also began to process her travel documents so that she could join her husband.

One day in April 2004, Ousman – who is Yus' best friend who acted as his go-between, and as a video-cameraman received an email in which Yus was accusing Fatou of having sexual relations with a drug-dealing *semester*<sup>14</sup>. I was in the office in MRC Farafenni that time and heard Ousman swearing and cursing!

'May God forbid it,' he repeatedly yelled as he pounded his desk with his fist.

'What is wrong?' I asked with concern over this uncharacteristic behaviour of Ousman, my ethnographic research translator at that time.

Eventually he told me. 'My friend's wife is cheating on him. He loves her very much, but she is busy having sex with a *semester* while my friend is away in Babylon, sweating and trying to make money for their living. The woman is now pregnant. She has never slept with my friend because they had their marriage ceremony while he was in the US. Yet he had to buy her gold for her teeth before she could

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<sup>14</sup> A local label for a Gambian usually resident in the West, who returns home for the summer holidays. Often associated with visible affluence such as large flashy jewellery, an English accent that is different to the local one, a pronounced gait, western clothes with brand names splashed across the front, new cars, etc, *semesters* are also stereotypically reputed for having numerous sexual flings while on holiday.



allow to marry him. *Billahi*, I will be the one to pull out that gold from her teeth, when I see her. I do not even want to go near her ever again,' he said with anger, pain and disappointment etched all over his face. 'You should hear her out, before you judge her,' I challenged. 'You should go to her and see her. You should be the one to pacify them, if it is true that you played a part in their coming together. You should not be the one to further divide them. Go to the girl's place. Talk to her. And then you will know the truth. It does you no harm to find out.'

'I hate her. I do not think I can bring myself to talk with her peacefully,' he replied. 'She betrayed my friend! She is a harlot who is not faithful to her husband.'

'I will go with you,' I quickly offered. 'I will talk with her. You can just come to see.'

And so we went to Fatou's house, late one evening in May 2004. I instantly liked her. As we got talking, Ousman confirmed that Yus was suspicious for nothing. His wife was still untouched, preserving herself for her absent husband, and very bitter about his unjust invalid accusations which had apparently reached her parents' ears. Ousman left after promising Fatou that he would talk to his friend about the falsity of his allegations.

Later that month, Yus returned home. After several discussions between his family, Fatou's family and the couple, peace was restored. Yus rented a two-bedroom apartment for his wife in Banjul. When Ousman and I visited, it was evident that harmony had been restored between the couple. And Fatou announced that she would be travelling with her husband, back to the US. She had been granted an American visa.

One year elapsed without hearing from Fatou, after she left for the US. And then one night, I received a phone call. Fatou was sobbing bitterly. Her husband had beaten her for receiving phone calls from male friends. He had closed her out of the house, leaving her wailing baby alone inside. The beatings have steadily increased, since that night. With no one to confide in, Fatou found herself turning to me for counsel, and comfort. When I was thinking about the ethics of including their story in my thesis, she insisted it was important. How many people are aware that marital violence is not peculiar to poor rural or African-based marriages? How many Gambian youths would believe that a model-like educated

beauty from a wealthy well-established, socially secure, Islamic-grounded family would receive immense blows of violence in un-ending series from her American-based *semester* husband of good-standing, thorough breeding as a Muslim who even attended *madarassa*, graduate level education, relatively very wealthy etc? When does the so-called 'African licence for violence'<sup>15</sup> ever stop, if it cannot stop beyond African borders? What factors perpetuate it? In the absence of local support networks, where do Gambian youths in diaspora resource their coping mechanisms? What stopped Fatou from revealing her plight to her parents, family and friends back home in The Gambia? Could the alienation of Yus from family and friends with a similar value-system, have played a role in his violence? Was Fatou's experience unique or common to other Gambian youths, irrespective of locale? What choices does a young woman have in her sexual relationships when she is married to a violent man? Why was it impossible for Fatou to seek a divorce from Yus, even in the face of his violence? Is the marital bed justification for marital blows? What role does violence play in the sexual lives of youths in The Gambia?... Several questions are yet to be further explored in relation to violence and sexuality within my research setting.

#### ***6.4 Even powerful men marry outside their will***

Baba Ballajo is a middle-aged public health specialist. He was the head of the Division Health Team (DHT) of North bank Division, the first two years of my fieldwork. Baba was first pointed out to me in March 2003 during a large public rally outside the humongous AFPRC General Hospital Farafenni. The throng of excited people were waiting for President Yahya Jammeh to address them during his annual national tour around the provinces. For the dwellers of the environs of Farafenni, this particular tour was special because it also involved the official opening of the beautiful large white hospital.

I later met Baba in person at his office, to request for a DOSH member to officiate at a workshop I organised for traditional birth attendants (TBAs) who had participated in some research I collaborated on. Though he delegated this duty to one of his staff members who worked more directly with these

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<sup>15</sup> There was widespread belief that discipline within marriages allowed husbands to beat their wives as part of 'African culture'.



TBAs, I found Baba Baalljo very agreeable. I was also impressed by his wide level of exposure to and knowledge of politics in contexts beyond The Gambia, and indeed Africa. In that meeting, I established that he was not only widely travelled, but he had also obtained his post-graduate training in the United Kingdom. Baba Ballajo, though humble in stature and highly approachable, was also a representative of the powerful professional elite in The Gambia.

While preparing the initial pilot study for the rural-based fieldwork in December 2003, it was to Baba Ballajo as head of the DHT that I presented my initial plans, schedules and a query about any possibilities of facilitation from his office<sup>16</sup>. I was wonderfully surprised; not only by his enthusiasm for my research topic, but also his offer of a driver, a double-cabin pick-up truck, and one member of his staff – Mohamed Saho, to bolster my team. And of course I was happy to meet his requirements to fuel the car and provide per diems for the staff involved. In addition, I was highly impressed when Baba Ballajo offered me a cup of coffee that his wife who worked in the nearby AFPRC hospital came to prepare.

Together with Mohamed Saho, Baba Ballajo helped me to map out possible geographical areas for the study, based on specific criteria I gave them. They also advised me about access, entry and introductions to the different social groups we anticipated I would work with. I went over translational hurdles that my research assistant and I had come across as we prepared the different question routes for the pilot study. It was Baba that gave me a contextually-appropriate justification for the study to present to the study participants in Farafenni.

‘In the village meeting, you should tell them that we at the DHT headquarters highly recommended your research because it attempts to understand an answer to several reproductive health queries that we have in the division. They are all aware of the big problem of young girls dying during childbirth. We had over fifteen cases from our division in this year alone. The elders will understand this problem much better than if you talk about AIDS. But then when you are talking to the young people, you can talk about your experiences with the epidemic in your country. Show them that if we in The Gambia are not careful, this

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<sup>16</sup> After leaving the MRC Laboratories, I largely lacked established institutional support particularly in the North Bank Division. Due to the power of the MRC in the division, I had anticipated scepticism from local health officials who collaborated closely with the daunting research council. However, I almost always received a pat on the back, and oil to grease my tired wheels, whenever I turned to the DHT offices in Farafenni.

problem will soon be in our country. The thing is that a lot of people in the provinces are still in major denial of the existence of AIDS. But then the youths have heard about it.'

Later when we were shopping for the items to take to the villages on our introductory trip, Muhamed Saho had intimated, 'Baba Ballajo enjoys chewing these kola nuts.' So I asked the elderly kola nut seller to wrap a smaller bundle of kola nuts, which I reserved and sent to Baba Ballajo. This very simple cultural gesture, opened a colleagueship that I found highly beneficial to my research.

One day during the preparatory sessions I had with Baba, we broached the topic of arranged marriages.

'Look at that young girl, over there,' Baba said to me, as he pointed outside his window. 'She was married off to an elderly man who is fit to be her grandfather. When she arrived at his home, he was shocked himself because she was too young to perform the functions of a wife. So he sent her back to her family.'

I looked out of his office window to an expansive field, covered with sand and yellow sun-burnt grass. At the gate, very close to where I had packed my bicycle, a young girl who could not have been more than twelve was playing with a goat – pushing it from the rear and forcing it to move forward. In disbelief, my eyes darted to and fro, in search of someone older. I was shocked because she was the only female in the compound.

'But why do parents do it?' I asked Baba.

'That is the same question I asked myself when my father was forcing me to marry a certain woman,' he replied.

Stunned, I turned from the window to look at him again. 'No! Even you?' I asked.

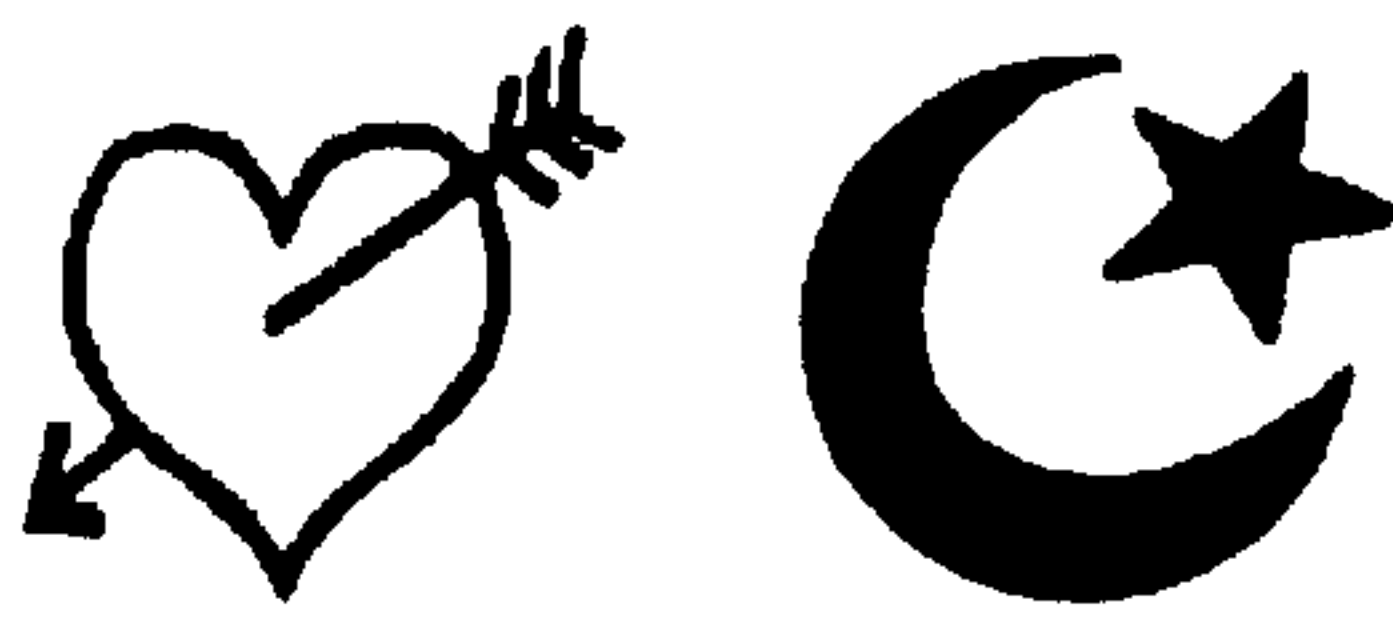
'Yes yes. It is not easy.'

'I thought that it was mainly a thing that was forced on women. I did not expect that a man like you can also be forced to marry someone he does not want,' I revealed. 'Tell me about what happened.'

And Baba Ballajo proceeded to narrate to me how he negotiated not to marry a woman chosen for him by his family. It took him years, subtle tactics, deployment of elderly patrons or kinsmen, appealing



to the emotions of his mother and sisters, and a seemingly iron-like determination not to marry this woman. In the end, he lost the battle – if only to appease his elders. Apparently, when the forced marriage bell tolls, even the powerful may fail to contest it.



## ***Chapter 7: Eros and the crescent: the role of Islam in the sexualisation of Gambian youths***

*Islam has been and remains influential in constructing lived experiences of sexuality in The Gambia. Muslim personal status law regulates issues of inheritance, marriage, custody, divorce, widowhood, sex and the sexual autonomy of Muslim women. Current constructions of 'tradition' in Islam cast anything related to sex and sexuality within the framework of marriage in all its modalities, and anything related to sexual desire and pleasure in the framework of heterosexual relationships as the normative.*

Touray (2006:77)

In this chapter I critically engage with the role of Islamic religion in the sexual landscape of Gambian youths. I examine the place of Muslim identity in definitions of self. I also analyse the intersection of Islam and sexuality as enacted in the narratives and experiences of these youths. What meanings does Islam bring to the sexual choices and experiences of youths in the study? How does it enable or dis-empower their sexualisation processes?

### ***7.1 'Islam is...': local appropriations of ambivalence***

*Islam can mean many different things to different people. Sometimes people talk about 'Islam' when referring to the culture or traditions from a particular country or from a specific group of people. Sometimes people use the word 'Islam' to refer to the practice of religious rituals and/ or spirituality. People also use the term 'Islam' to talk about a political viewpoint and sometimes they are referring to what is known as 'Islamic law or shari'ah. This body of rules, norms and*



*laws is itself made up of several schools of thought and differing individual opinions of Muslim scholars...*

SAFRA Project (2003)

Islam is not only international, it is also a fast-growing religion (Adahl and Sahlstrom 1995). As a label, it is ambivalent in meaning: it could refer to the observance, belief and practice of religious rituals or spirituality mandated by the Qur'an and hadith; or to the cultural customs, values, norms and traditions of a group of people – usually the culture of Arabian peoples; or to a body of legally-binding rules with prescribed and proscribed patterns of lifestyle with respective rewards or punishments as enshrined in Islamic law – *shari'ah*; or even a particular political viewpoint. The Islamic world is engaged in debate between orthodox/ fundamentalists and liberal/ modernist/ progressive Muslims about the practical meanings of 'what it is to be a Muslim today'. While variants of the former group emphasise the need to retain the spirit and letter of the Qur'an, maintain Islamic life as codified in the *shari'ah*, and implement this Islamic law as inherited from the past, the latter group wants to 'remake the *shari'ah* in the image of the modern world, recodify it by adjusting it to the modern world, and even leave out some of its provisions and laws, because they regard them disturbingly out of step with the modern world' (Ali 2001:99).

Contemporary world events including the September 11<sup>th</sup> bombing of the World Trade Centre, the western occupation of Iraq, related wars, stringent immigration procedures as guards against terrorism, etc reveal the dynamic power that Islamic ethos has on its followers. Alongside these scenarios captured by the international media, are the millions of ordinary faithful Muslims who peacefully go about the mundane realities of living in contexts as diverse as rural Sudan, down-town New York, icy Stockholm, over-crowded Bombay, drought-ravished Niger, bomb-ridden Baghdad, touristy Alexandria, etc.

Whilst scholars of the 'Islamic world' (for example Boonstra 2001, Roald 2001) start their discussions by highlighting the diversity of peoples and geographical regions encompassed under this umbrella term, emphasis has mainly considered the study of Arabs, peoples of the Middle East territories,

and sometimes the Muslims in Asia. Relatively much less attention has been given to African Muslims, particularly those located in sub-Saharan Africa. The advent of Islam in Africa dates much earlier than the eighth century (Adahl and Sahlstron 1995), spreading from the North and East into the rest of the continent. This resulted in synchronising processes which mixed aspects of indigenous African religious beliefs or practices and Islamic ones. Because Islamic belief was mostly carried by peoples mainly originating from Arabic subcultures, some aspects of Arabic culture were incorporated into local customary practices that were encountered on contact in diverse African settings.

Most of the available work on Islam in Africa is based on the Maghreb<sup>1</sup>. As a sub-Saharan African who has lived in both Uganda and The Gambia, I have witnessed the diversities inherent in the performances and lived realities of Islam among Africans. Having lived in East, West, and Southern Africa, I can state that sub-Saharan African Islam is distinctly heterogeneous in several respects<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore Adahl (1995:7) raises some essential questions that are critical to unpacking the meanings embedded within the notion of an African Islam. 'Should we consider the African continent as culturally united or separated by the Sahara? What has been the impact of Islam? Is there an Islamic culture in Africa uniting north and south, east and west, or is the Sahara separating Africa into different Islamic cultural regions? And what is the Islamic cultural heritage of Africa?'

Constructionist approaches reveal that the social cultural hegemonies within particular contexts colour the emic appreciations and local enactments of sexualities; informing the associated social prescriptions and proscriptions (Foucault 1990). For example in a setting where the religious ethos

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<sup>1</sup> According to Adahl and Sahlstrom (1995:3), 'the oldest literary sources on Islamic sub-Saharan culture date back to the thirteenth century, when Arabs and Persians travelled extensively in many parts of the continent... But only North Africa, as one of the most important regions in the history of Islam has been paid considerable attention by experts on Islam. Archaeologists have studied African Muslim culture of the Swahili coast for years, with little or no support from, for example, art and cultural historians. The art and culture of sub-Saharan Africa have, however mainly been studied by art historians and anthropologists. Nevertheless, these studies have usually not taken full account of the Islamic dimension.'

<sup>2</sup> My observations are confirmed in literature. Adahl 1995:11 claims 'it is obvious that West and East Africa present completely different scenarios in relation to the central Islamic world. In West Africa, Islam infiltrated from the north and north-west mainly through trade, in periods over several centuries beginning in the ninth century (Trimingham 1962). In East Africa, Islam was brought from the east and north-east, mainly during the thirteenth century, to stay and to spread, although not far inland beyond the coastal area from Somalia in the north to Mozambique in the south (Trimingham 1964, Chittick 1974, Garlake 1966).



condemns homosexual activities, devout elders will perceive a man having sex with another man as sinful, immoral, and perhaps against the ordained divine order for normal people. Men who are known to be homosexual will either be maligned, outcasts, criminalised, regarded as unhealthy, or even not masculine. Given the diversity of the growing Muslim world<sup>3</sup>, library research reveals an imbalance in the research-based literature about the links between Islam and sexuality. The majority of work is devoted to either understanding sexualities of the Arab world (Ilkharacan 2002, El Saadawi 1980, Gocek and Balaghi 1994, Hale 1989, Jawad 1998), or Muslims based in the western world – specifically Europe and America (Roald 2001, Anwar 1985, Rosander 1991, Vetorech and Peach 1997). There is limited work on interactions between Islam and sexuality among Muslims in sub-Saharan Africa (including Touray 2006, Ezeilo 2006, Yusuf 2005).

Furthermore, an inherent shortcoming is the tendency to become reductionist and ascribe totalising generalisations which deny heterogeneity and diversity by employing such labels as 'Islamic sexuality', or 'Muslim sexuality'. For example, in an attempt to claim distinction, Ali 2001:34 states, '...western sexuality is different from Muslim sexuality...' thereby killing the diversities within, and perhaps also neglecting the intersections between the two classificatory groups that he constructs. In the steps of the challengers of Caldwell et al.'s (1989, 1991) claim of an African sexuality, I reiterate and ask: 'Is there a distinct Muslim sexuality? If so, how different is it from other human sexualities? What is its unique distinction(s)? Can there ever be a pure practice of this assumed Muslim sexuality?' Feminist, LGBT and reformist critique in fact highlight the need to question, reformulate, examine and reinterpret totalising patriarchal frameworks of interpreting Islamic ethos in relation to sexuality, particularly those that assume universal applicability (for example SAFRA Project 2003, Rahim 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from the intra-Africanist synchronisations of Islam and African custom, scholars have identified other external sources of Islamic influence permeating into sub-Saharan Africa. 'The different areas of Islamised cultures on this continent and the possible influences from the surrounding Islamic regions, i.e., the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent, and the Maghreb as an important intermediary of Islamic influences. These relations and conditions are vital in understanding Islamic culture in Africa...' (Adahl 1995:7).

Because of complexities surrounding its definition, I investigated lay meanings of Islam, and explored various enactments of Islamic ethos in the day-to-day lives of Gambians in the villages and town centres I lived<sup>4</sup>.

## **7.2 Hygiene and rules of cleansing**

Cleanliness is next to godliness in Islamic ethos and culture. In addition to *wudu* – ablution prior to prayer - physical cleansing, including ritual baths called *ghusl* and toilet hygiene, are critical to Islamic bodily purity. Thus pure water is mandatory for the cleansing of human waste, particularly urine, excreta, and also menstrual blood, semen, vomit, phlegm, flatulence, etc. In the absolute absence of water, then other materials like sand, or a clod of earth can be acceptable. Dry ablution is called *tayammum*.

I found in the study area that people widely practised Qur'anic prohibitions against having sexual intercourse when a woman was menstruating because they believed she was unclean as long as she was bleeding. Participants believed that the female body was purified from this pollution only through the ritual bath locally called *gusl*, followed by ablution and recitation of Islamic prayers.

Likewise, study participants reported that it was important for sexual partners to have the ritual bath at the end of every sexual encounter which involved the release of sexual fluids including semen and vaginal lubrication. It took me a while to understand the meanings of the frequent late-night baths of compound members in the more spatially restricted compounds that I lived in. However, when I understood the Islamic demand on all sexually active adults to perform these diverse ritual baths as a prerequisite for spiritual purity which allowed them to commune with Allah, then it made a lot of emic sense.

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<sup>4</sup> I describe and discuss diverse sites (including language, salutations, worship, material culture, time use, marking seasons, celebrating rites of passage, naming, dress and costume, hygiene, etc) where local notions of Islam interface with everyday realities in 'Consuming the Qur'an', - a paper presented at the Medical Anthropology Seminar Series of LSHTM.



Figure 7.1 Learning to perform ablution



### 7.3 The centrality of Islam in the hybridization of Gambian youth identity

*Africa's Black Muslims thus add fuel to the old issue of the ambiguous association between Islam and Arab identity. An ancient Islamic maxim affirms: 'The Muslim (convert) becomes a blood relative.' Islam certainly provides an important bridge between the Arab and African worlds, but it does not ensure that those Africans who embrace the faith will choose to identify themselves unequivocally as Arabs. Here, as elsewhere, today ethnicity remains fluid, opportunistic and problematic. Lewis (1999:98)*

*In the Islamic world the **umma** of Islam, the common belonging to Islam and the religious community, is supposed to unite all Muslims and to be of greater importance than political borders. Within the Dar-al-Islam (the Muslim world), Islam has contributed to common traditions and common cultural expressions. Adahl (1995:11)*

Islam played a major role in how individual youths and some youth subcultures self-identified. For many youths, it was the most significant factor that determined how they presented themselves to outsiders. 'I am a Muslim, before I am any other thing,' was a common refrain in the data surrounding identity. Where



it was combined with other factors (see figure 7.2 below) such as education, gender, age, location, ethnicity, etc, Islamic religion often featured among the key ingredients that contributed towards how these youths perceived and understood themselves. Islam was a common explanation for why things were the way they were, the order of the universe, the nature of man, the politics of gender, how individuals understood their individuality, group belonging, history, and their sexuality.

(Me as) Interviewer: What is your religion?

Rasta Bonga: I am Muslim.

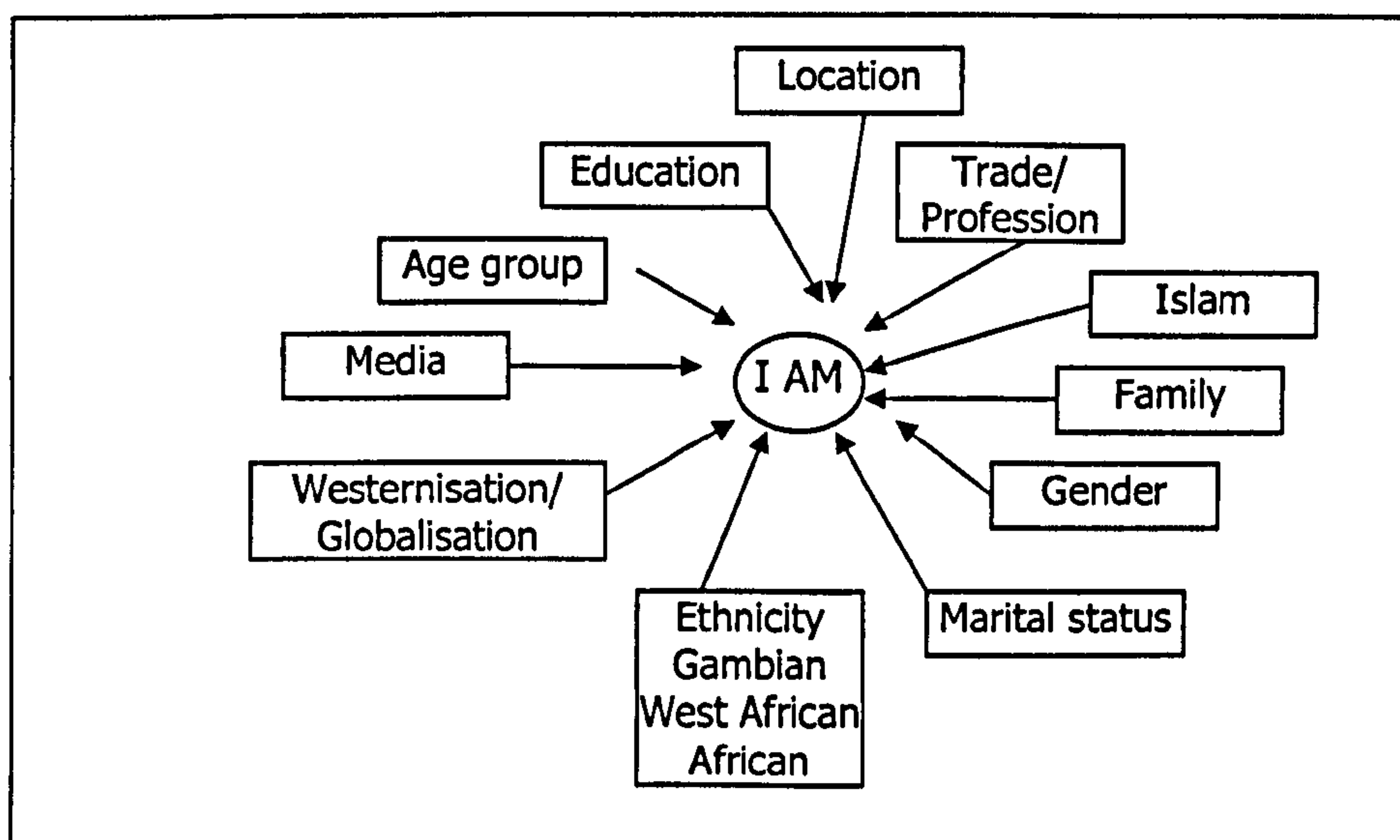
Interviewer: But from your appearance, you look like a Rasta.

Rasta Bonga: Well, in truth I am a Mustafari. I am a Rastafari by appearance. But I am a Muslim by faith.

Interviewer: Does your father know that you are a Mustafari?

Rasta Bonga: Hehehe no. That is what we call ourselves here, me and my boys. It is a name for the beach. My father knows only Islam. (IDI BB Jan 2004)

*Figure 7.2 Potential ingredients of Gambian youths' identities*





It is confusing, but not so much. You see, my father is a Muslim. But he divorced my mother. I grew up with her family. Uncle Peter is a Pastor. He raised me as if I were his own son. So I learnt everything that a Christian does. But then when I moved with my mother, I had already learnt to live like a Muslim. So I guess I am Chrismus. Yes I am a Chrismus. I can fit both ways.

**(Field notes - Sulayman)**

As indicated in the first quote above, Islam frequently formed the core and foundation of the ingredients various youths in the study appropriated to identify themselves. However, there were many individuals who also combined other creeds such as Christianity, Rastafarianism, Atheism, or their ethnicity, a reified notion of Africanism, to locate who they were. Sometimes there were stark contradictions between what individuals said they were and what they actually looked like. One of the initial issues that I grappled with in the early days was my automatic response of defining and attempting to identify people based on their outward appearance. Prior to meeting some young people in The Gambia, it was not unusual for me to look at someone's costume and determine apriori that they belonged to this or the other subculture. However my frame of reference was brought into question, and variously turned upside-down, when individuals told me that my classification of themselves or others they knew, was wrong. For example I had always associated dreadlocks (particularly on a black man) with Rastafarianism. However, as illustrated in the quotations above, costume or apparel and identity did not always connect according to my essentialist schema.

It was also not uncommon for youths to combine their location, age, gender, marital status, profession or trade, etc with other ingredients when labelling themselves. For example one could state, 'I behave this way because I am an educated urban dweller...', or 'As for us Mouride Muslim youths, we...' When discussing why some youths with Arabic sounding names that were ordinarily associated with Islam, ate pork or drank alcoholic beverages, I sometimes encountered examples such as, 'He is a confused Chrismus. That is why he eats pork and he drinks palm-wine with those Aku people.'

As earlier intimated, more than 95% of The Gambia's population comprises Muslims. Furthermore, it is known as an Islamic nation in a lot of local discussions, even though Islamic law (shariah) is not the predominant national law<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, I was not surprised about this finding. The majority of youths organised their self-identity around the precepts of Islam as locally practiced in their specific contexts<sup>6</sup>.

#### **7.4 Islam and sexuality**

My ethnographic fieldwork confirmed the opening statement of this chapter quoted from Isatou Touray's (2006:77) discussion of female sexuality in The Gambia. Throughout my data – be it the field-notes, individual interviews, focus group discussions, or policy texts, the centrality of Islam to lay meaning-making systems of sexuality resounded. Notions of respectability of individuals from different social classes, genders, age-groups, ethnic groups, etc, were held together by overriding principles defined by society based on local interpretations and performances of Islam. The youths I studied (and the adults in their lives) defined boundaries of acceptable sexuality, sexual behaviour, and sexual activities with reference to how they understood Islamic prescriptions and proscriptions of what was right or wrong, sinful or acceptable.

##### **7.4.1 'By Allah that's haram!'**

When interacting with study participants in different contexts, I variously encountered the concept '*haram*'. My explorations of meanings associated with the word *haram* revealed it was an Arabic word inserted into everyday local language, meaning taboo or something forbidden for religious reasons particularly because of the belief that it was polluting or that it was in violation of Allah's order for the wellbeing of men and women while on earth. *Haram* was often used in its Arabic form even when people

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<sup>5</sup> Others such as Boonstra 2001 list it under 'The Muslim World' because it is among the nations with a majority Muslim population; more than 90%.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to highlight that there are various local flavours of Islam available in The Gambia including the Mourides, Tijans, Tabliques, etc.



spoke (to me) either in English or other local languages. For example when we talked about food taboos that were locally practiced, I was always told that pork and alcohol consumption were *haram*. Thus practising Muslims did not eat pork or foodstuffs known to contain pork such as bacon and sausages<sup>7</sup>. Likewise beer, wine, spirits, anything known to be alcoholic was taboo for practising Muslims, even though this was not always followed. Another common example where I encountered the use of the word was when children were insulting each other they often said, '*Ki defa domi-haram!*' (meaning 'This one is an illegitimate child.') Directly translated to me as 'bastard child', *domi-haram* was one of the few insults that was taken seriously and seemed to deeply grieve the recipient of the abuse. I once had to resolve an office conflict between two adults who had a quarrel and one referred to the other as *domi-haram*, opening up serious sessions of reporting, reprimanding, and even involving higher organisational administrators.

Furthermore, *haram* was sometimes used in formal interviews, specifically when participants were presenting societal attitudes towards some sexual practices including anal sex, homosexuality, and bestiality. For example:

Interviewer: What do you people here think of homosexuality? Is it common in this area?

Lamin: By Allah, that is *haram*!

BobGee: *Chum chum* [as he held his nose] it is dirty. Filthy.

Sillah: *Astagafullulahi* ...

Bou: It's not an African thing. It's *Toubabs* who do it. Not us. (FGD Kotu boys)

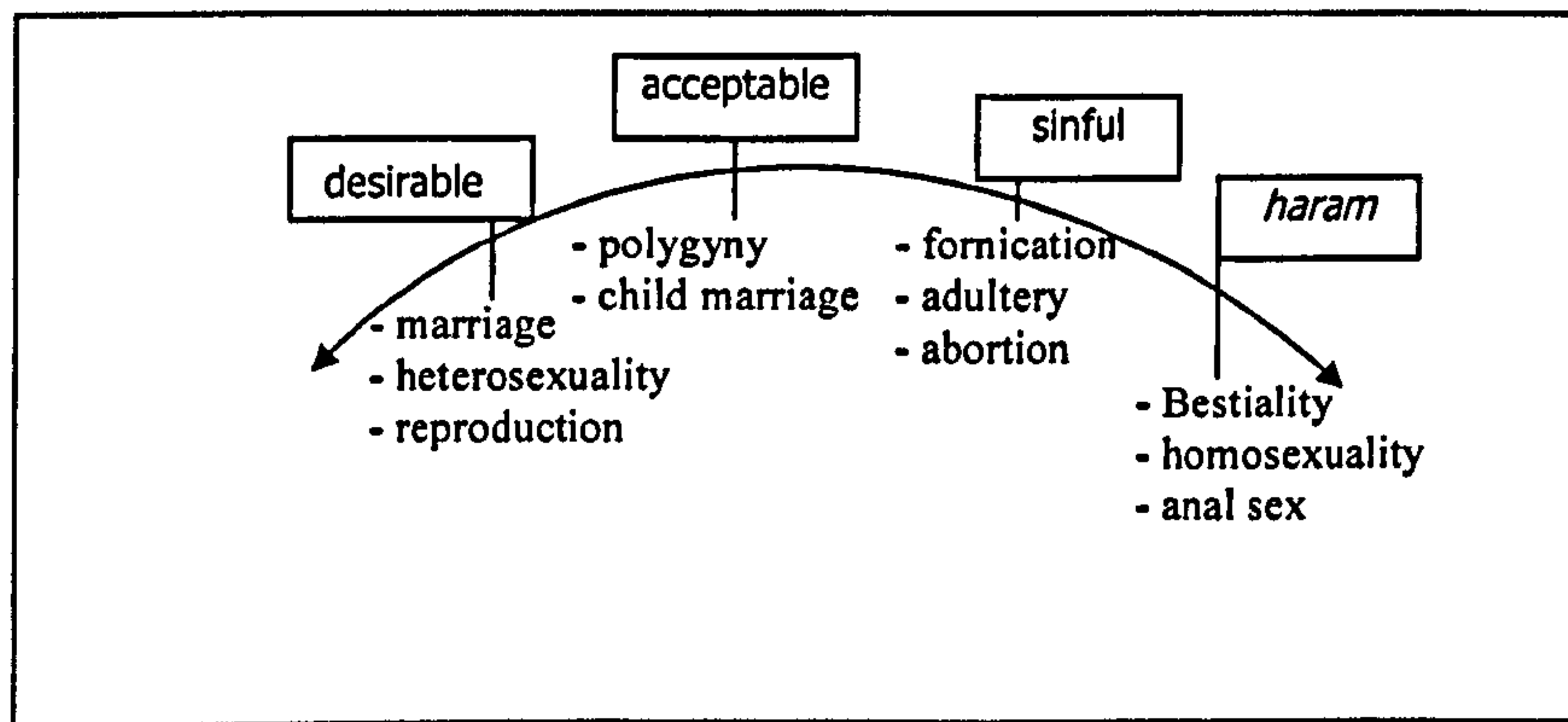
Abortion was often referred to as *haram*, as well. However, some study participants explained that some sexual activities were not necessarily *haram*, but rather sinful because they broke the ten commandments of Mosaic law found in the Torah, which is an integral component of the Qur'an. These people included

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<sup>7</sup> However some rural Muslims justified their eating of the flesh of wild pigs by claiming it was a different animal to the one forbidden in the Qur'an, with wild-pig hunting being a favourite pastime of some men folk in two study villages I lived in. I was chanced to go hunting one night and learnt there that even though the men in the hunting party were all Muslims, they were happy to share the game caught – even if it turned out to be a wild pig. That night we caught a hare with the bullet of one of my research assistants.

abortion, fornication, and adultery as sexual sin. One could repent of sexual sin, therefore it was not serious as doing something *haram*, when it came to judging the seriousness of these actions. Thus aspects of sexuality were unconsciously plotted along a continuum, with four main categories running from the desirable, through the acceptable, sinful, and forbidden (see figure 7.3 below).

Figure 7.3 Continuum of local Islamicised schema for sexual activities



As highlighted in the preceding chapter, reproductive heterosexuality within the context of Islamic marriage arranged by the families of the couple was the most desirable form of sexuality within the study context. This fit neatly within the Islamic script of meaningful sexuality: reproduction, marriage, familial obligation, kinship ties, the significance of religion in contracting marriage and naming children. More Muslim children resulted from such a sexual union; equilibrium in society was maintained.

#### **7.4.2 Heterosexual normativity**

For a simple definition, 'heterosexual normativity is the assumption that people are innately attracted to the opposite gender and that a family can be based only on a relationship between a man and a woman. This assumption belies the diversity of human behaviour and experience. Because of heterosexual normativity and heterosexual assumption, non-heterosexual experiences are deemed less valuable and are assumed to require explanation.'<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Culled from [http://www.helsinki.fi/henkos/tasa-arvo/policy\\_against\\_discrimination.htm](http://www.helsinki.fi/henkos/tasa-arvo/policy_against_discrimination.htm).



The heterosexual normativity prevailing in the study setting was due to local interpretations of Islamic constructions of the cosmos and equilibrium in social relationships between men and women. Generally, people in the study setting believed that Allah created men and women to complement each other in the sexual relationship<sup>9</sup>. Therefore they reasoned that the socially approved order ordained by God was that sexual relations normally occurred between men and women. Thus when men had sex with men, and women with women, they believed that this was abnormal and went against God's natural creation and social order. On the whole, I found high levels of intolerance towards homosexuality.

Homophobia was manifested in a variety of ways, including mean jokes about homosexual unions, ridiculing the imagined or rumoured or reported activities in homoerotic relationships, offensive name-calling that appropriated homosexual metaphors such as *gor-jigen* discussed in chapter 1. In the data there is ample evidence of queering of people thought to be homosexual. They were variously described as immoral, deviant, evil, sinful, *kaffir*, wicked, weird, sick, abnormal, spoilt, degenerate, un-African, not Islamic, irreligious, possessed of devils, ugly, unhealthy, generally misfits in society who perhaps had a mental disturbance or illness.

I got a strong impression from many people that it was important that I did not come across as sympathetic to, understanding, condoning, or even accepting homosexuality as another legitimate form of sexual expression. On many occasions it was directly and clearly articulated. At other times it was tacit, covert, indirect and implied messages that I had to decipher. People spoke in parables of how the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were burnt in fires sent by Allah and it was not only those who were practising homosexuality who were destroyed, but also those who lived with them, condoned their sexual activities and allowed the practice as if it were not a disgrace to God. HIV/AIDS was often associated with degenerate sexual behaviours including homosexuality. Many study participants from diverse social backgrounds and settings claimed that Allah was punishing contemporary society for sexual sin often represented by homosexuality or/and promiscuity in the narratives, by sending HIV/AIDS and hiding its

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<sup>9</sup> See also the principle of opposites discussed in Nyanzi, Bah and Joof 2007.

cure so that people would refrain from such sinful lifestyles. It was as though HIV/AIDS was the equivalent of the fires of destruction.

In my study, I only came across two individuals who openly admitted to having participated in homosexual behaviour. Both of them were male urban youths who identified as *bumsters* and reported during separate individual interviews that they were normally heterosexual, but that they had engaged in homosexual relationships with foreign tourists because of cash payments. Both reported that they were connected to the tourists by an immigrant pimp who operated within the Senegambian tourist area linking up local suppliers of sexual services to visiting foreigners who cared to indulge. I never met any female youths who admitted to being homosexually-oriented, even though the literature contains some indications of lesbianism occurring within The Gambian context. According to Touray 2006:82,

In the Gambia, lesbianism is taboo and many people do not believe that it exists. It is not recognised by society and is seen as an unacceptable social relationship. It is referred to as the practice of an alien culture by those who are psychologically and spiritually lost. Lesbian relationships do, however, exist among women in the Gambia, but are kept secret for fear of social rejection. Lesbianism in the Gambia has a historical association with families with powerful women. More research is needed into how far creating social relationships is an expression of resistance within the Gambia's highly patriarchal society, and how far these relationships provide the space for women to express their sexuality and have control over their bodies.

Generally, in the spaces where I was able to generate conversations about homosexuality and move beyond the stereotypical presentations of sinfulness, deviance, and sickness, it was clearly evident that many youths and adults were judgemental of what they were highly ignorant about. This ignorance of the basic facts pertaining to the homosexual expression of sexuality was stamped all over the naïve assumptions and questions they had. For example, 'How does it happen?' 'Is it painful? What about the faeces in the buttocks if he enters in there?' 'A man has no vagina, so where does his friend go?' 'What do they get out of it?' 'Using the anus as an entry point instead of an exit can loosen the whole excretion



system causing one to become an open channel that has no control!’ ‘Why don’t they enjoy women?’ ‘How does one penis enter another penis?’

Many study participants also believed myths and misconceptions which revealed their lay understanding of female and male bodies. For example that grown girls and adult women had heat inside their lower abdomen region, which necessitated regular cooling by a man’s ejaculate. Also, that boys and men needed to regularly empty their sacks of accumulating semen otherwise their balls would burst. Basically the majority of study participants who were open enough to discuss the subject also framed homosexuality as a practice for men and not women. Therefore gay men were often talked about, but not lesbians. When I brought it up in conversation, or discussion, I was variously asked many questions about the mere impossibility, as if I were asking a stupid question. For many people, the common question was, ‘how would women do it since they don’t have the bodily equipment like a penis’. This revealed that local constructions of meaningful sexuality were highly phallogentric, concentrating on penetrative sexual interaction between a penis and vagina. Once, when a tourist-guide told us about his encounter with foreign lesbians, the other youths who were seated around us taking *attaya* were outraged by the incredulity of the tale and they responded by calling this young man a liar.

#### **7.4.3 Sex in the context of marriage**

*Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will.*

*Qur’an 2:223*

I was called Ndey Kumba – the name given to visibly pregnant women, long before my religious marriage ceremony. In fact I bore my first daughter before this ceremony. So I experienced first hand the stigma associated with unwed pregnant women. Unlike the local young women, however, I did not have to shift away from my parents’ residence, to go into hiding until the birth of the infant. During this period, I was repeatedly told about the importance and necessity of ‘going to the mosque to tie the marriage’. This would supposedly restore my honour. I also learnt that the religious marriage was more socially

important than the festive celebrations, the cultural exchange of dowry, or even the legal procedures of contracting a marriage through public administrative offices.

In Wollof, marriage as contracted by Muslims at the mosque is referred to as *taka sei* meaning 'to tie the marriage' or 'to tie the knot of marriage'. The marriage festivities are called *chet* (noun) or *chetal* (verb), and dowry is *alal sei*. The bride is *set bu jigen*, the groom is *set bu gor*. *Sei*, the word for marriage, is also a polite way (often used by adults) to say 'sexual intercourse' which is otherwise referred to as *tukunyu*, *nukante*, *lalante*, *bijang*, or *boja* – (after the pounding action of pestle and mortar). A sexual relationship is called *dohan*, a friendship *harit*, a boyfriend or lover is *farr*, and a girlfriend is *janhala*. Erotic love is *nop*, or *nobante* which is differentiated from *buga* – to like someone/ something. Divorce is called *sei bu tas* meaning 'the marriage has broken'. Separation is *fai*.

It was evident that many participants tapped into the socially approved script which allowed the freedom of sexual expression within the limitations of heterosexual marriage either contracted by the Muslim elders, kin-group leaders, or state representatives. The initial qualitative data abounded with the normative stance. However my participant observation data revealed that many youths in both the urban and rural study areas were sexually active even though the majority were unmarried. High levels of sexual activity among unmarried Gambian youths have been reported by other studies using research methods alternative to mine, including (Miles et al. 2001, Shaw et al. 2001, Ratcliffe et al. 2000, Child Protection Alliance and Terres des Hommes 2003). This normative stance made it difficult for unmarried youths to access some sexual health services because their sexual activity when interpreted through the lenses of the prevailing Islamic ethos, was breaking social codes.

It was striking that many youths whom I interviewed believed that the husband was entitled to sexual services whenever he required them from his wife. Many reported that the wife was created to pleasure her husband, take care of him and bear him children. He on the other hand was created to provide for her. Discussions about husbands pleasuring their wives were very rare<sup>10</sup>. I explored

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<sup>10</sup> Compare with Touray (2006:79) 'Many of our respondents have reported experiencing dry sex and painful sexual intercourse... The respondents also revealed that foreplay is not a practice they engage in...'



perceptions of what was acceptable even within the parameters of marriage. For example if a husband required anal sex from his wife, was it socially approved for her to comply simply because they were married? If he requested sex when she did not want it, to what extent could she refuse? Was it socially acceptable for a wife to ask her husband for sex? Generally, participants reported that even within marriage the double sexual standard discussed in chapter 4 was maintained. Marriage did not suddenly free female youths into a terrain where they had the power to initiate sex or bargain for sexual styles or activities that their husbands did not warrant. Participants reported that this was particularly true for rural girls who were not expected to be sexually exposed.

Although many youths engaged in premarital sexual activity, they often discussed it as dangerous and potentially polluting. Furthermore, according to Miles et al. (2001:756), youth participants in twelve focus group discussions about sexual health seeking behaviours of young people in the Foni region of The Gambia, reported that ‘...those with non-marital partners’ were at a great risk of catching STIs. This was confirmed in my data whereby premarital and extramarital sexual activity were not only perceived as sinful, but also as a high-risk activity with potential for exposure to STIs including HIV/AIDS. Because sex was only approved of within the context of marriage, anything falling outside these boundaries was discussed as illicit, and potentially damaging not only to the individuals involved (through diseases and unwanted pregnancies) but also to their marital partners (in the form of jealousies or exposure to STIs for co-wives), the extended family members (issues of shame, loss of family honour and integrity), the reputation of the kin-group, and destabilising society in terms of threatening other social relationships budding from the disrupted marital union. If it was an unmarried woman who was involved, she was perceived as spoiling herself before meeting her spouse, thereby reducing the chances of securing a marriage into a good family and fetching a handsome bride-price. If it was a married woman, there was always the fear that her children would reap the consequences of her infidelity; God and her husband would both curse her, causing her children to suffer.

#### **7.4.4 Sex for reproduction**

*... however, Islam clearly values procreation within marriage, and fertility is highly prized. Children are a gift of God, the "decoration of life," says the Koran [sic]. Some have used this basic position to argue that Islam does not permit contraception or abortion. But on the whole, says Carla Makhlouf Obermeyer in Power and Decision: the social control of reproduction, the Islamic texts do not present a major obstacle to family planning. Indeed, many Muslim religious thinkers over the past quarter-century have maintained that, notwithstanding Muhammed's exhortation to multiply, family planning is permitted and even encouraged by Islamic law.*

Boonstra 2001:4

During the religious ceremony of tying my marriage, the Islamic elders, *Imam* and *Oustaz* who were present, made a ring around my sister-in-law and me. They prayed over me that I would have a fruitful womb bearing plenty of sons for my new husband. They stressed that Allah would provide abundantly for these children.

As a wife and mother, I also learnt that it mattered whether one bore a son or daughter. Early reactions to the news of the birth of my daughter often upset me.

'Thank God you are alive,' people told me. 'We pray that Allah gives you a son next time!' '*Insha Allah* you will have a son next time!'

It was as though bearing a daughter was a failure of some sort.

Clearly in the local mindset, 'the best form of sex is that which yields a child – specifically a son.' This emic construction was rarely articulated, but several enactments of sexuality and reactions towards them clearly relayed this message. Infertility was one of the most highly feared and stigmatised conditions in the study areas, with many *marabouts* claiming to have the religious abilities to cure this and other sexual problems (see Nyanzi, Bah and Joof 2007). During the reproductive years, and within the fold of marriage, sex without children was mainly abhorred. Women defined themselves in relation to their abilities to give their husbands more children, preferably sons, and in large numbers. Co-wives often competed among themselves by conceiving and bearing children, with the aim of having more sons (see



also Madhavan and Blesoe 2001, Bledsoe 2002, 1998). Wives claimed their status was elevated more in the eyes of their husbands and in-laws if they produced as many boys as possible. Illegitimacy was bad, but it became acceptable when a son was born. When interviewing a young divorced woman, she sobbed bitterly, asking me over and over again, 'What did I do to God Aminata? Why didn't he give me any children? I don't want to be a *kanyeleng*<sup>11</sup>.'

#### **7.4.5 Early arranged marriages**

As presented in chapter 5, the ages at which many of the youths married qualified their unions as child-marriages. Coming from Uganda where the age at first marriage for girls was often in the mid-twenties, it was shocking for me to meet teenagers who had three or four children. This was both normal and frequent, in the perception of many key informants that I interviewed<sup>12</sup>.

'If I tell you that it is not common, I will be telling lies. It is common. It is normal. People do not feel guilty about it. A man can stop his daughter from going to school, so that she can get married to his friend's son. If the son is a young man, that is okay. Sometimes the men are old elderly Pas. Don't you see the wife of the Alkalo we visited last week? He is a whole Alkalo. And he married her. She is just sixteen. Whereas he is maybe sixty-two. And he is not unique. There are many like him.' (KII Farafenni)

Youths had mixed feelings about the practice of child-marriages. There was a deceptive public rhetoric in which the marriage of young girls was condemned as a form of child-abuse. I was often presented with this 'whitewash' story when I blatantly asked in formal settings about participants' views on child-marriages. However when we got down to talking from the heart, there were many voices of indifference on the part of the male and female youths for whom it was not an imminent reality. Others were resigned to the fact that it was bound to happen and no one could stop it if the parents had gone to the trouble of arranging the marriage. Several study participants reported it was sinful to disobey one's parents and

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<sup>11</sup> A local group of infertile women, who become griots and jesters at ritual ceremonies and occasions. For a contemporary discussion see Hough 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Cf Nyanzi and Nyanzi-Wakholi (2004) where we problematise the condemnation of 'sugar-daddy' relationships and yet many societies such as my Gambian fieldwork setting, condone and even promote child-marriages.

detrimental to one's wellbeing because Allah punished disrespect for parents. In line with this reasoning, and backed by examples drawn from Islamic religion, it was not infrequent for participants to retort that there was nothing wrong with child-marriage because even the Prophet Muhammed married a wife who was just a child. Because I had repetitively heard this claim, I sought for its meaning and context from Pa Saidou Ceesay, one of my ethnographic field fathers and self-selected *marabout*.

Aminata: Is it true that the prophet married a woman who was a youth?

Pa Saidou: Yes. Definitely.

Aminata: Tell me about it.

Pa Saidou: Aisha was the most beloved wife of the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him). She was his youngest wife. Their marriage was tied when she was still just a young girl. She was only six years old. She was not even present, but her father did it on her behalf. Maybe there were ten or twelve wives, I forget. But then he continued with his other wives. He first met with Aisha when she was ten years old. And it was her father who asked for this. So if you tell a man who knows this story that it is wrong to marry a young bride, he will ask if you are saying that you are better than the prophet (PBUH). **(Field notes March 2005)**

How did one tackle issues of abuse of children's rights to protection from sexual violation if the idealised script which governed every aspect of social life idealised a male figure who married a six year-old and consummated his marital union with her at the age of ten? This question reinforced within me the significance of context even to issues of rights that are supposedly universal. When placed in the position of a rural Muslim Gambian youth, and told that I was going to be married off to an adult man just like Aisha, the prophet's wife, what resources (if any) could I mobilise to resist or challenge this seeming abuse? I realised that indeed, just as beauty lay in the eyes of the beholder, so did abuse and the violation of sexual rights. In this case, especially if one were socialised within this context where Aisha and her husband were revered as messengers of God, and also where it was the order of the day to marry-off children and teenagers, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to even see what was wrong with child-marriages. No wonder that some youths in child-marriages that I interviewed, felt it was an honour



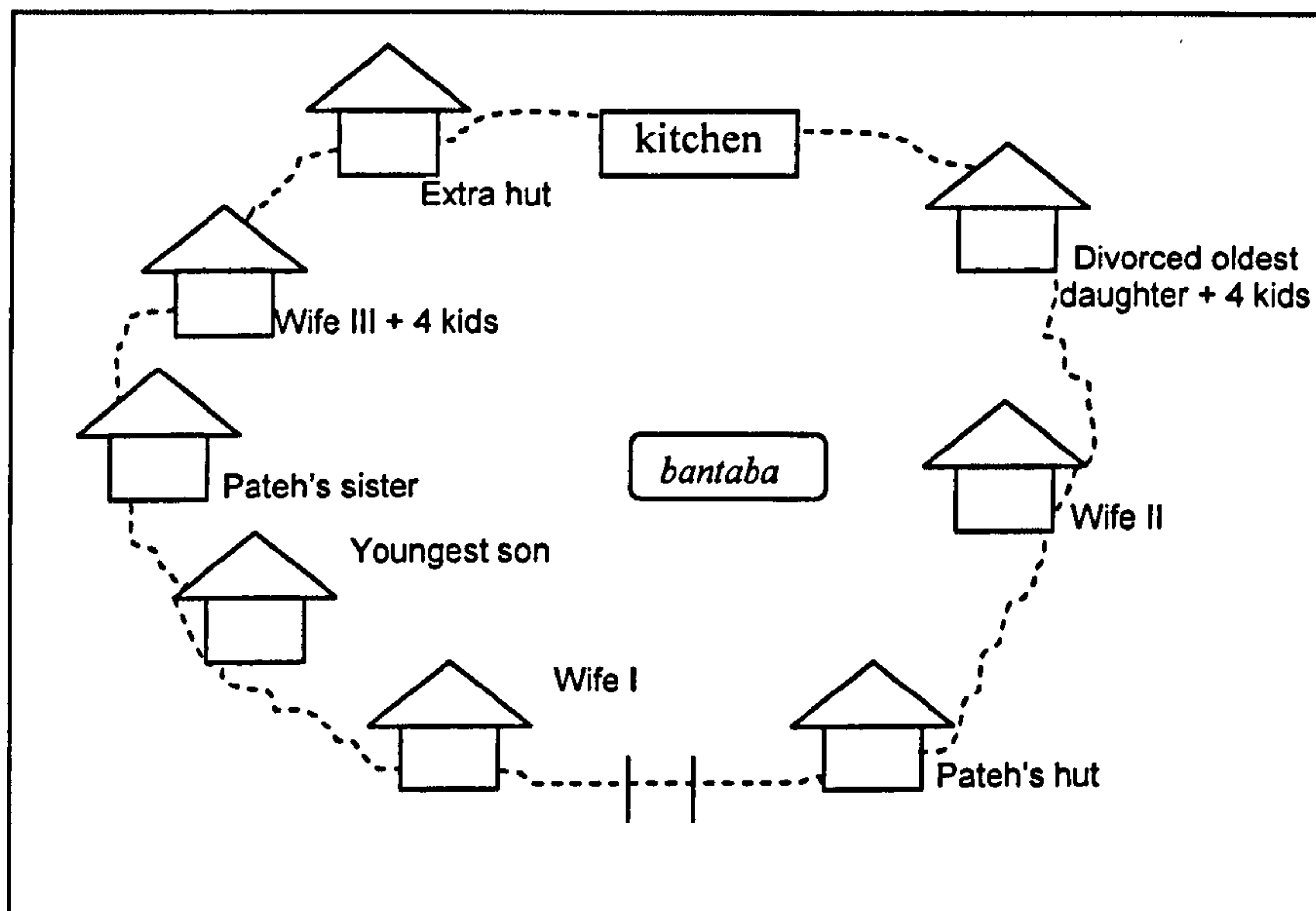
to be married young just as Aisha had been. They rationalised what others labelled as sexual abuse by referring to historic storylines within Islam.

#### **7.4.6 Polygyny is within the script**

*And if you have reason to fear that you might not act equitably towards orphans, then marry from among the women such as are lawful to you – two, or three, or four; but if you have reason to fear that you might not be able to treat them with equal fairness, then marry only one – or from among those you possess. This will make it more likely that you will not deviate from the right course. Qur'an 4:3*

Polygyny was a widespread practice during the time I was in the field. All the six compounds I had an opportunity to be a member of for a sustained period (either as an adopted daughter of the compound head, or as a paying tenant) were polygynous. The compound heads had at least three wives in each instance. Also, many of the older sons of these compounds had more than one wife. While most of these polygynous unions had all the co-wives living within the same physical location – the compound - in one case the wealthy United-Kingdom-educated compound-head had three concurrent wives and each was living in a separate double-storied compound in the Kombos, as well as one divorced wife living on her own on the outskirts of a tourist resort area. His divorced first-wife was remarried to a peasant in the provinces.

Figure 7.17 Rural polygynous sleeping arrangements: e.g. Pateh Bah



Attitudes towards polygyny were highly ambivalent with some study participants emphatically opposing the practice, and others as strongly supporting it. Proponents of polygyny always backed their stance with references to Qur'anic scriptures, notably the above one allowing up to four wives per man. Others often cited the fact that the prophet Muhammed had about ten wives or more in his lifetime and yet he was still Allah's messenger. A few participants claimed that a man was legally allowed up to seven wives in his life, explaining that at any one time he could have up to a maximum of four wives but then he was also allowed to divorce up to three times, bringing the count up to seven<sup>13</sup>. Therefore they argued that it was within the permitted marital arrangements in Islamic ethos. The male youths were mostly in favour of polygyny, arguing that it was necessary to have other wives in case of marrying an infertile first-wife, or if she produced only daughters (see also Touray 2006). Some stressed that in the case of having such a wife, even if the concerned husband was not in favour of marrying another wife or wives, his family members often pressured him into the action by going as far as 'marrying another wife for him'. It was not always necessary for individuals to be present when their marriages were being tied at the mosque,

<sup>13</sup> I was not able to ascertain this numerical count as sourced within Qur'anic scriptures.



but instead their family members could represent them. In fact when my marriage was being tied, Ousman chose to remain at his mother's house while I went with his eldest step-sister and my mother-in-law to the mosque where the Islamic elders performed the religious rituals for the ceremony. I also variously participated in marriage ceremonies where one or both marrying individual(s) were either abroad or away from the scene of tying the marriage.

Sallah: If you have your first wife pregnant then it is good to have another one to go for sexing instead of going outside where you might catch diseases like this AIDS.

Ebou: But also a woman can be seeing her menstruation and she is not free to meet with her husband for sex. That way if I have another wife she can help me out of the problem until the other one finishes her menstruation.

Fafanding: Having one wife is a problem for you if she has only girls, girls, girls. What about getting a son to be your heir. You better try with another woman and make some sons. **(FGD Yallal male)**

Kah: To marry one wife alone is not good for you as a man because this woman can become too important thinking that she has you in her control. She can even boast that she fed you on her *marabout's juju* until you became soft, not looking at this woman or that woman. She will not be obedient to the husband. She just does how she wants. She can even faece on your head. But if you marry another wife, then she knows she is not the most important thing in your life and she will obey you because if she does not she knows that you can get this from another wife. It is a good way to control women from being too strong headed. **(IDI)**

Many male youths believed in the need for competition as a measure to control their wives and keep them subservient, temperate, and obedient to the husband. In their discussions, they reported that rural, uneducated Muslim girls were best suited to marry as second wives because they were more likely to accept this as their fate or destiny ordained by Allah. Several youths claimed that educated girls from urban settings were more likely to oppose polygyny because they were exposed to human rights and

western ways of life that encouraged monogamy. A few even mentioned that it would be wrong to marry a girl from a Christian family and then expect her to accept a polygynous union because her religion did not allow this as Islam did. Others reported that polygyny was an entitlement that was facilitated by accumulating wealth, particularly in the form of multiple compounds. Concurrent multiple wives were widely believed to be a mark of wealth and higher social status.

When a man is rich and he buys many compounds, he needs to marry many wives to look after his compounds. What do you expect him to do? If he builds a small house there, then he can put one wife there. And he buys another compound, and also he marries with another wife to look after this one. When a wife is there it will push the man to build on his land. Then it will increase his wealth. And people will respect him more. (**Samba Soto 19-year-old male**)

Not all male youths were in favour of polygyny. A few, especially in the urban school-going groups, expressed disapproval of having more than one wife because of diverse reasons including the cost involved in maintaining multiple wives, the fear of catching STIs, and the emotional turmoil arising out of female jealousies. Some claimed it was old-fashioned. Those who were employed mainly argued based on the fact that they imagined it would be costly.

I am struggling to manage my fares to go to work everyday. Before my salary comes at the end of the month, it is difficult yet I am now staying at my sister's compound. So what will happen if I get two wives? How will I manage to take care of me and them and their children? If I marry, it will be with only one woman who will give me my children. (**Kotu 19-year-old male**)

On the whole, female youths who were unmarried were either opposed to polygyny or otherwise resigned to its inevitability. Many of them questioned why Muslim men who supported polygyny based on the Qur'an did not read other Qur'anic scriptures which highlighted the dangers of polygyny.

Yamadingding: It is not alright for them to say that the Qur'an allows them to marry one, two, three, four wives if they do not also do what it says to be fair to all the wives by treating each as the other. If you buy dress for one, you buy dress for all – the same cloth, and design without



favouring the one you love most. That is what is written. Be fair to all. If you cannot treat them with fairness it is better for you to marry only the one wife you have.

Jatou: Fair is not easy. If you ask a mother with more children she will tell you that she has her favourite son or daughter. She may not like one because he is thief or he has bad behaviours and difficult to manage at home. She may love one more because he is well behaved and kind. Another may be very hardworking, like that. Then if it is difficult for a mother to treat all her children fair without loving one more than the other ones, what about a husband and many wives?

Fair is difficult. **(FGD LAHS)**

I found the Qur'anic source of this need for fairness that was frequently referred to by those who did not support polygyny to be Quran 4:129:

*'And it will not be within your power to treat your wives with equal fairness, however much you may desire it. Do not allow yourselves to incline towards one to the exclusion of the other, leaving her in a state, as it were, of having and not having a husband. But if you put things right and are conscious of Him – behold, God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.'*

In addition to the above condition of fairness that was variously cited as a difficult, if not impossible Qur'anic prerequisite for polygyny, many of the study participants who opposed the practice pointed out the often neglected need for the husband to obtain permission from his first wife or other existing wives, before marrying a new wife. Unlike the fairness condition, I was unable to ascertain the Qur'anic source of this.

Kine: Many men do not ask their first wife for permission before marrying with a second or third or fourth wife. They just tell her to get ready to meet the new wife at the marriage ceremony.

Adama: It can be a very terrible shock. It happened to my older sister and she cried a lot. She did not believe because he had never shown her any sign that he was looking for another wife. She was doing her best looking after him.

Maimouna: It is not good at all because a woman can do all so well and then she ends up having other wives as if she was a lazy wife. Why do men want many wives? Not to get someone to look after them. No. It is about sleeping with different women.

Interviewer: What happens if the first wife challenges the man about this decision to marry a new wife?

Maimouna: If you know what is good for you, it is better you keep quiet and say nothing.

Kine: He can beat you senseless.

Awa: Or even divorce you.

Adama: Yes, he says if you do not want to be with him because he is marrying another wife, he divorces with you. He can even tell your family that he is divorcing with you because you do not want him to marry with another wife.

Awa: People will laugh at you or even scorn you if you divorce because of that. People here say a man marrying another wife is no reason for divorce.

Maimouna: That is true. (FGD Jericho female)

In a few instances, female youths rebutted this scripted male prerogative for multiple marital partners by asking why they were not equally entitled to polyandry. This argument was mostly raised by people who came across as relatively more empowered through higher education and exposure to the West through travel or diasporic residence, and to non-Islamic faiths. Several Christians were quick to point out the patriarchal trait of Islam based on this favouring of polygyny over polyandry.

#### **7.4.7 Commercial sex is sinful**

While many participants reported that commercial sex work was a common practice particularly in specific well-known urban and/ or tourist resort areas, they were also positive about it being sin according to the Islamic script for sexuality.





## ***Chapter 8: Sexual and reproductive health of Gambian youths***

In this chapter I describe and discuss diverse aspects of sexual and reproductive health of youths in the study areas. I focus on how the youths understood their own issues.

### ***8.1 A repertoire of prevention strategies***

Early one morning in December 2003, I was shocked to find a new-born baby lying wrapped in brightly coloured cloth at the rubbish dump three minutes' walk away from my house. Its eyes were open. It was silent. Flies were settling on its face.

In a panic I ran back to the house and summoned my landlord's wife. Her immediate response was to remark about how common the practice of child-abandonment had become in the Kombos these days.<sup>1</sup> This refrain was repeated in the local gossip, evening chats, in radio broadcasts, and even at the police station when I went to give my statement about finding the abandoned baby.

During my antenatal visits to some of the public health facilities I had been struck by the relatively large number of pregnant women who appeared to be under eighteen years of age. Because we were asked our ages by the records official, I was able to hear how old the other women were. For me, as a pregnant ethnographer, it was fascinating to sit in the long queues and observe how pregnant youths received antenatal care in health facilities (see also Erulkar et al. 2005, Kristin and Magnani 2003). Eavesdropping on conversations among the mothers, and observing the interactions between the mothers

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<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of 2004, the United Nations offices in Cape Point, commissioned a study about the factors behind the increase in child-abandonment in The Gambia. I was unable to locate their results or publications arising out of this research by the time of submitting this thesis.

and antenatal care staff revealed that there was widespread apprehension about using strategies to prevent pregnancies based on western biomedicine.

Therefore in designing the questions for the research, I included a section that explored strategies to prevent pregnancy used in the sexual relationships of the youths I studied. As illustrated in figure 8.1 below, there were diverse methods known and used, from lay, professional, and commercial providers.

*Figure 8.1 Inventory of prevention mentioned by youths*

|     |                                              |
|-----|----------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Abstinence (** to run away from boys – NYSS) |
| 2.  | Condoms                                      |
| 3.  | Withdrawal                                   |
| 4.  | <i>jujus</i>                                 |
| 5.  | Herbal concoctions                           |
| 6.  | Lay remedies, e.g. egg, washing powder       |
| 7.  | Modern contraceptive                         |
| -   | Family planning pills                        |
| -   | Diaphragm (also called the loop)             |
| -   | Tying your tubes                             |
| -   | Female condom                                |
| -   | Injections                                   |
| 8.  | Luck                                         |
| 9.  | God's will                                   |
| 10. | Pre-menarche sex                             |
| 11. | Female circumcision - infibulations          |
| 12. | A form of rhythm method                      |
| 13. | Douching after sex                           |
| 14. | Abortion                                     |
| 15. | Non-penetrative sexual activity              |
| -   | Kissing                                      |
| -   | Touching erogenous parts                     |
| -   | Mutual masturbation                          |
| -   | Fingering                                    |
| -   | Telephone sex                                |
| -   | Oral sex                                     |

**8.1.1 Sucking sweet mints with their wrappers: the condom debate**

There were several lay names for condoms among the youths. These included *Foolane* (Mandinka), ‘carwash’, French letter, *kawas* (Wollof for socks), socks, sim card, hose, in-shirt, *kawasi whe' ne'*, *foleh*, *copico*, bandage, *lengeh*, etc. In one focus group discussion *Femigum* was mentioned – meaning female condom.

Discussions about access and availability revealed that condoms were sold at hospital, but also given out free in some places such as the Gambia Family Planning Clinic, The Red Cross, and some antenatal



clinics, and by researchers at the MRC. Many believed that these methods of protection were cheaper in hospital than in shops or pharmacies.

Resp: I saw it for the first time at a youth convention organised by some people from Banjul. Yes.

It was like a long balloon. [Giggles...] They showed us how to use it. They put it on a big wooden carving of a man's *chuchu*. (IDI 16-year-old female – Jericho Wollof)

In some rural areas, girls openly reported that they did not know what condoms looked like. There was a stark contrast to the showing off of being up-to-date and knowledgeable about recent contraceptive methods that was evident in some of the urban-based discussion groups such as the ones held with participants in youths' associations.

Makia: I don't know the condom.

Aisatou: I only know of condom because I heard about it. I didn't see it.

Bintou: I don't know any other name because I don't even know what is a condom. I heard it from people. (Jericho Wollof FGD girls)

Male youths in the urban area were confident in their conversations about condoms, sometimes explaining at length the pros and cons of using them. In the rural study groups, the discussions were not as vibrant when it came to the topic of condoms. The male youths in this sub-group seemed to broach the subject with caution, often revealing they were aware of what condoms were, but also controlled so that they did not come across to their colleagues and village-mates as if they were doing the socially unacceptable. In a village where the youths were very devoted to Islam, condoms were discussed as an evil from the West! These rural-urban disparities were more obvious among the female youths. Urbanity coupled with education meant that their knowledge of condoms was relatively higher. In addition, many reproductive health programmes were located in the Kombos, targeting urban youths with sexual and reproductive health education much more than they did rural-based youths.

A wide range of sources of condoms were mentioned by urban youths including pharmacies, drug stores, hospitals, clinics, bars, hotels, friends, shops, supermarkets, pubs, youth-workers, and campaigners. Rural youths had fewer sources, which included hospitals and health visitors.

Several youths reported that they could go to the hospital to learn about condoms and contraceptives. Sources of information about condoms included health educators, youths who go for campaigns, and the media.

Doctors and nurses like going to the televisions and radios to talk about using it the safe way.

They use cucumbers or bananas to show us what to do. (LAHS)

Similar to findings from other studies (MacPail and Campbell 2001, Meekers and Klein 2002, Flood 2003, Plummer et al. 2006, Measor 2006) youths mostly agreed that condoms were good for protection and prevention, but they were also perceived as a western sexual health item, and criticised for interrupting achieving quick pleasure.

'Using the condom is like licking a sweet mint in its wrapping,' they often retorted. 'Where is the sweetness in that?'

Participants reported that it was harder work, and took more skill and time to ejaculate when one had a condom on. It was mainly boys (but also some girls) who reported less enjoyment of sexual intercourse when they used condoms. Furthermore, urban focus group discussions touched upon the 'less than total safety' from using condoms.

Paula: But apart from reducing the enjoyment of sex, these plastic socks are not 100% effective.

Even sometimes pregnancies can occur when using condoms. (LAHS)

There were several urban-based participants who reported that condoms were commonly used in their areas, specifically because they were more aware of HIV/AIDS. When discussants reported usage of condoms, they also often revealed disagreement within couples about whether or not to use them.

... but for most of our couples, sometimes it's like one person wants to use a condom and the other does not; like sometimes a girl might want to use condoms whilst the boy won't want to use condoms because that boy might feel that there is no sexual satisfaction in using that condom. But also a boy may want to use a condom and a girl may not want to use it. It all depends.

There were two perspectives about who initiated condom use. While several participants reported that boys had the socially approved prerogative to buy, suggest and initiate condom use, many of those who



were still in school argued that it was girls who had more to lose from sexual activity in the form of pregnancy resulting in expulsion from school or parents, guardians or other benefactors withdrawing resources supporting school attendance. In the latter perspective, the onus was on the girls to protect themselves and their education.

Binta: Now we have to stay in school and not marry quick. So girls like to ask to use condoms to remain free from pregnancy. So they put curtains over their parents' eyes to think that the girl is still untouched. (**Kotu IDI girl**)

Zainabou: It could also be the girl. Because she might not want to get pregnant. Also, girls nowadays think, you know. Now at our stage..., like when we are getting married. Like, they know that if nobody ever sees them walking with a big belly, they won't care if you are a virgin or not. So they feel also that if they use the condom, she won't get pregnant and her family would think she is still a virgin. (**LAH FGD mixed**)

In addition to contraception and prevention of infection with STIs, girls claimed that condom use effectively enhanced their scheme of deception to convince parents, family and any other societal observers or monitors that they were not engaging in premarital sexual intercourse. They reasoned that with the exception of self-reported sexual activity, the only proof of being sexually active was pregnancy. Therefore they felt that they were confident with condom use to ward off the unnecessary concern, rebuke and suspicions from relatives keen to ensure they maintained their virginity until marriage. This enhanced their marketability for marriage because it was important for first-time brides to be virgins.

### **8.1.2 Suspicions, rumours and misconceptions shrouding modern contraceptives**

Modern contraceptives (other than condoms) based on western biomedicine were known by the initials of their generic name: FP – family planning. However most of those few youths who reported using these methods as a preventive strategy did not actually know or understand what they were actually given. They

neither knew the names of the products, nor how they worked. In their narratives, they either described the colour, shape or smell of the objects/ substances, or otherwise related how they used them.

Jarrai: I was given an injection for FP. I was taking it every six months. But I fattened too much. So my sisters told me to stop. When I stop I get pregnant with Kujabi.

Interviewer: What injection were you given?

Jarrai: I don't know. It was injection for FP. I was taking it from the Gambia FP Clinic there on the road to Kannifing. **(19-year-old urban female)**

Kumba: Before I married with him he was buying for me the tablet for FP from pharmacies. He told me he cannot take me to America with a baby. So I was taking the tablet each day. But it was easy to forget taking it and he got very angry because I forgot to take it, saying that I want to make something like a trap for him, or what.

Interviewer: What tablet for FP was he buying for you?

Kumba: FP... It is a packet with four lines of tablets in a row with two colours. You take one when you are on the menses. You take others when the blood stops coming out. I was taking one in the morning after my prayers. **(24-year-old female Tallinding)**

As listed in figure 8.1 above, many common forms of modern contraceptives were mentioned including pills, injections, intra-uterine devices, condoms, tubal ligation. Interestingly the knowledge about modern contraceptive use was highly gendered. Contraception was discussed as a thing for women to use; if they did not take care of it, it was their bodies that got the effects. Thus while tubal ligation - commonly referred to as 'the tying of the tubes' was frequently mentioned, vasectomy never arose even once in the data. With the exception of a few, most male youths reasoned that they left issues of contraception to the girls in their sexual relationships. A few argued they had to provide the money to purchase the contraception because their female partners mostly could not afford it. In three examples, the male youths were directly involved in ensuring that their sexual partner took the pills regularly. One of them reported



actually accompanying his girlfriend to a family planning clinic where they were taught together about different methods.

Study participants reported that they mostly got their information about family planning from the radio or from health workers in the village. Students also mentioned school science lessons as an avenue of learning about contraceptives. There was contention regarding the role of parents in teaching their children about using contraceptives. While many youths argued that this was irresponsible behaviour by the adults because it acted as a mandate allowing young people to engage in premarital sexual activities, others reasoned that such adults were more responsible because the youths were already sexually active anyway. Therefore teaching them about contraception was for their own sexual and reproductive health, ensured they made informed choices about their sexual lives, planned their pregnancies, and reduced chances of catching STIs particularly HIV/AIDS.

Hm, it is not possible for my mother or father to talk to me about those things. Even me myself I would be shy to face them because it means that they know I am sexing somebody. (**IDI male**)

Parents are shy to talk about protection to their children. It is only foreigners like Nigerians and *Toubabs* who have no shame of doing this. (**Key informant male**)

In urban focus group discussions, some youths revealed that it was their parents who advised them to join family planning clinics. One girl confided in me that she was taught about contraception by her mother who went as far as taking her to a private clinic where she was given a coil. However the majority reported that they sought their knowledge about prevention strategies from peers, siblings and healthcare providers.

The value of modern contraceptives was variously contested by many participants – both youths, adults and elders. Many of their reasons were based on myths and misinformation which contributed substantially to misconceptions about the functions, usage and potential side effects of modern contraceptives (see Nyanzi, Manneh and Walraven 2007, Nyanzi, Bah and Joof 2007). Due to several myths, family planning was often relegated to second position and priority was given to abstinence until

marriage in the narratives. The main theme of these myths was that pills could cause barrenness in women.

Leila: I can kill my son. Because if I know that I am pregnant, so I use these tablets. That is not good.

Int: You can kill your son?

Leila: Yes. The pills will kill your baby in the womb when he eats them through the mother's blood.

Binta: Some say if you go to family planning you will never get a baby when you are married. Before you are married you go to Family Planning. When you marry, you will not get a child. Is it true?

Int: She is asking, 'Is it true that when you go to Family Planning before marriage, when you get married you will not get a child?' Someone tell us.

Njilang: It's not true.

Awa: I don't know.

Int: So what advice would you give to young people who fear the problems of killing the son or not having a child?

Binta: I am advising young people that they should control themselves before they join family planning, until they get married.

Njilang: But it is part of it. If you go to family planning, it's better. If you say you are not going to family planning and you cannot control yourself, the boy will fool you until you get pregnant.

**(Urban FGD girls NYSS)**

The data contained many reports from the girls about wanting to use what they called 'family planning' to avoid pregnancy, but the boys refused them. Many of the schoolgirls we interviewed advocated contraceptive use, due to the need to protect their education goals. However when asked how many actually used these prevention methods, only three urban-based girls ever admitted that they did – one as a prescription to regulate her painful menstruation cycle. The majority of female students in the study



reported that they initiated condom-use in their sexual relationships, and kept harassing their boyfriends to use them lest they withheld their sexual favours. Boys argued that a girlfriend who used modern contraceptives was a *chagga* who did not want to get pregnant.

### **8.1.3 Even jujus are contraceptives**

As intimated earlier, the condom<sup>2</sup> was variously mentioned as a mode of 'prevention' relevant in sexual relationships. What was interesting particularly because I was not expecting outright admission of its popularity or even its use among contemporary Gambian youths was the use of *jujus* for contraception. Although mostly mentioned by female participants – both youths, adults and elders - *jujus* for prevention of pregnancy in sexual relationships were also common knowledge among some male youths who at times initiated the topic without prior prompting from the research team.

Apparently from the data, participants reported that there are various forms of *jujus* that can be used as contraception. The most commonly mentioned one was a portion made from the ashes of burnt Qu'ranic scripture handwritten on papers, mixed with herbal powder and spoken over by a powerful *marabout* specialising in this field of healing (see Nyanzi, Bah and Joof 2007 for a detailed discussion of the role of *marabouts*). This powder was then wrapped up in leather pouches, tied onto elastic binds or strings along with an assortment of colourful beads and worn round the waist under clothes – only to be seen by a sexual partner or spouse, and the owner. This particular *juju* was very similar to *binbins*, (discussed in chapter 4). Another variation of this *juju* for contraception involved a fixed set of waist-beads counted to approximate the days of the menstruation cycle of the concerned woman. The colours corresponded to safe days, unsafe days and in-between days. This type was reportedly mostly prepared by Laobe or traditional birth attendants, although one eighteen-year-old mother of two reported to have received a similar *juju* from a Fula *marabout* who also dabbled in herbal remedies to cure barrenness in

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<sup>2</sup> Female condoms were only mentioned once in all the data collected from the different youth subcultures. Although they did not distinguish between the male and female condom, by deducing from field observations, participants were referring to the male condom. In everyday interaction and discussions, 'the condom' is a label used to refer to the male condom.

women and impotence in men (refer to Nyanzi, Manneh and Walraven 2007 for a discussion of the role of TBAs as providers of contraceptives in the Northbank division).

Some participants revealed that they bought herbal concoctions for drinking as contraception from *marabouts*. Others reported that the concoctions were poured into bath water and either used over the entire body or specific body parts. Three girls specifically reported douching with these herbal concoctions. One of them revealed she was advised by her premarital sexual partner to douche thus, as an integral part of her ritual bath for cleansing after sex (refer to chapter 7 for a discussion of Islamicised hygiene).

In all the cases, participants reported that lay contraception was not free, but had to be purchased. Payments ranged from twenty to over one thousand *dalasis*<sup>3</sup>, or otherwise payments in kind such as goats, chickens, offering services like transporting some items for the service provider, child-minding, etc.

Int: Okay. Where do you get the contraceptives?

Resp: The *juju*, they can make it for you or sell it to you. And the condom, if you go to the hospital, they will sell it to you.

Resp: Like the *juju*, you can go to a *marabout* and give him money. Or he will ask you to give him a goat which is equivalent to thousands of dalasis. And he will make a *juju* which will prevent you from pregnancy.

Resp: She can go and he make a *juju* for her or give her a concoction to drink or take bath with it. Or she go and find condoms

Resp: You mean she buys condoms. (Jericho Wollof girls FGD – 06/03/2004)

All these *jujus* had specific instructions and conditions attached to their use. Some were used prior to, during, or after sex. A few were as precise as an hour before or 'immediately after sex when having the ritual bath.' Some were used facing in a particular direction. For example, Adama a twenty-two-year-old roadside seller of roasted groundnuts and mother of two children explained, 'He told me never to face Mecca when I was washing my body with this *juju*. If I did so, I would have another accident and get

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<sup>3</sup> From less than 50 pence to over £25.



baby when I am not prepared. But when we went for the *magal*<sup>4</sup> in Senegal, I did not know which way was Mecca. After meeting with my man, I went to wash my body. I think I faced the wrong way. That is why I got this baby you see here on my back.'

Other conditions in the data included, 'I was to use this *juju* only at night after a bath', '... never to have sex without this *juju*. Don't you see it can be like the *jalijali*?', '...to drink it one hour after sex and then say prayers', '...to drink the water after washing the *juju* and then rub my belly with the palms of my hands so that the medicine goes into the body', '...to wash inside my privates with water washed from the *juju*'.

There was widespread belief in the efficacy of the *jujus* used as contraceptives. Many participants claimed to trust the *jujus* and local herbs more than modern family planning methods which were rumoured to have many side-effects. The belief in *jujus* was not restricted to only rural peasants but it also spread to include some urban-based, educated, wealthy individuals<sup>5</sup>. Some youths reported it was their parents who purchased their *jujus* for them.

In one focus group discussion there was heated debate about the implications of a parent buying or providing a child with contraception. There were strong supporters of the view that such actions were irresponsible because they encouraged looseness, sexual permissiveness, premarital sex and promiscuity. However, some did hold the opposite view. 'It is irresponsible for a parent to just let the child live like that without any protection and yet he knows very well that this child is having sexual things with the friends. If the parent is paying school fees, it is better to give the child protection in order to go through the education course successfully without stopping for pregnancy or getting problems of abortion. If you love your child you will do all that is necessary to secure her future and to keep away the shame of a bad name from her and the whole family.'

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<sup>4</sup> Mini pilgrimage to the tombs of local Saints, specifically in Senegal.

<sup>5</sup> It was not uncommon for some of our evening gossip to touch upon the contradictions emblematic of well-educated wealthy urbanised women who sometimes even had access to international Western travel and/ or residence, and yet were also widely rumoured to spend large portions of their finances, time and energies on pursuing the remedies of different *marabouts*. 'She is always taking long mysterious journeys to the provinces because she is searching for a more powerful *marabout* than the last one she visited. Heh, why doesn't that woman just settle and get contentment?' was a frequent rejoined about different individuals.

Among those who reported using *jujus* as contraception, there was a seeming blindness, or perhaps denial, of the possibility of failure of their preferred means of protection. I explored their perceptions of slippages or failed contraception through *jujus*. There was a general admission that some girls who used *jujus* did end up pregnant. However it was not the form of contraception that was queried, or found wanting. Instead study participants tended to put the blame on misuse, poor observance of the conditions, improper use, or a breach of the *marabout's* conditions. To them, the *jujus* were infallible. It was the user who did something wrong, or failed to meet a condition.

Malick: My girl at that time was using these *jalijali* because she got a *juju* to prevent anybody from 'pregging' [meaning impregnating] her. I used to sex her plenty times without socks. But no pregnancy. And then one day she forgot this *jalijali* in the bathroom where she went to visit her aunt. The *marabout* had said to hang it on the wall above her bath water when she takes bath. She had a nail in the wall of the bathroom at home. But at her aunt's house they have an outside bath with thatch walls. So nowhere to hang her *jalijali*. She forgot it where she hanged it. When I came into her, only once and she get pregnant. You see, she was not wearing the *jalijali* on this one round. And she told me after sexing. So when she missed her monthly, I knew it was because of me.' (Repeat IDI, urban male)

Among reproductive health workers based in the biomedical health sector, I generally found disgruntlement about the popularity of *jujus* for contraception. Pharmacists, nurses and doctors tended to discourage the use of the *jujus* and recommended modern contraceptives if abstinence was impossible. However, there were some inconsistencies with this trend among biomedical reproductive health practitioners. For example in my conversations with Habiba – an SRN midwife and nurse working in a busy pharmacy on the main road to my house in Tallinding Kunjang, I was always intrigued by the apparent contradictions. At one level, she sold different brands of the pill, three varieties of condoms, and even had access to injectables for those who could afford them. She often referred women to the Gambian Family Planning Clinic in Kannifing. However, she also advised me to take my maid to a *marabout*



whose contraceptive *jujus* were widely reputed to work. During an interview, I had confided in her about my concerns for my rural-migrant housemaid's seeming interest in dodgy boys in the neighbourhood.

'If you get this *juju* for her, it is very strong. And it sticks for a long time – maybe two years. If she is a bad girl, walking this way and that way anyhowly, she will not get into trouble: bringing grandchildren which her poor parents do not need as yet,' she advised.

When I later cross-checked with her about this contradiction in practice, she explained that for people – girls or women, couples or an interested male partner – who were unable to afford the continuous expenditure purchasing modern contraception entailed, she recommended these *jujus* because they worked particularly when the user believed in their power. She further revealed that she had personally taken two of her dependants (who lived with her during school term and returned to the provinces during the holidays) to buy such *jujus*.

'As students, they need to be prevented from any hindrances. Since they have not got plenty money, the *juju* is good because you pay for it only once<sup>6</sup>.'

#### **8.1.4 Abortion**

Abortion was sometimes mentioned in discussions about preventing pregnancy. This was interesting because of the seeming unawareness of the difference between prevention of conception and elimination of the foetus prior to birth.

Int: What are the other methods which can prevent pregnancy apart from condom use?

Binta: When she is pregnant and she wants to abort it, she can drink water to abort it.

Int: What kind of water?

Adama: Concoction. [Laughter]. Or they write something on a paper and you put it into the water and drink it to abort the pregnancy<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Compare this view of a biomedical practitioner to attitudes of TBAs from Berending and Marakisa who are better exposed to teaching about the transmission of and protection against HIV. They reasoned 'The only *juju* is being steady.' (Nyanzi, Bah and Joof 2007)

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the widespread belief in the power of the Islamic scriptures to take on a potency capable of effecting actions, see (Nyanzi, Bah and Joof 2007, El Tom 1985, Geertz 1968).

Amie: The elders say if you mixed an egg with blue<sup>8</sup> and you drink it, the pregnancy will be aborted. But then when God says it will not abort, it will not be aborted.

Saidat: They say if you want to abort a pregnancy, you can go to a *marabout* and he will make a concoction for you or you go to the hospital and they abort it. All that has no use because all of us have to be faithful and wait for the right time. To be pregnant at the right time and God helps you to deliver in peace is the best thing. (FGD – Jericho Wollof girls)

Participants were knowledgeable about a variety of means of abortion. These ranged from going to hospital for specialist biomedical intervention, using backdoor procedures conducted by paramedical personnel who are locally referred to by terms not differentiated from those for professionally trained practitioners (for example *Doktoro* –in Mandinka), going to TBAs who are renowned for assisting women with pregnancy, child delivery and post-partum care, to *marabouts* whose specialisation lay in various combinations of Islamic scriptural therapies, herbal concoctions, or soothsaying, or to lay people using everyday remedies whose efficacy and safety were not established. Taxonomical analysis of the inventory of routes to achieve abortion related to Helman's (1994) model of therapeutic options.

There was a tension between perceptions of and attitudes towards abortion based on Islamic notions of personhood and biomedical principles of reproductive health necessitating abortion, for example to space children, or to intervene against possibilities of ill-health. While abortion was interpreted as murder of the unborn foetus and therefore sin against Allah in local Islamic ethics, it was also a reproductive health intervention when interpreted through the biomedical lens. Due to its interlacing with notions of shame, waywardness, sin, murder, and misplaced sex, abortion was generally highly stigmatised. However it was also a widely accessible health intervention because preventing pregnancy was of greater importance than STIs and infertility.

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<sup>8</sup> Local name for a blue powder available commercially in the local corner shops, and specially used in laundry to whiten clothes, or brighten white linen.



### **8.1.5 Other methods**

Although not mentioned in the qualitative data, breastfeeding repeatedly came up as a well-known natural contraceptive by both youths and adults, male and female, in the urban and rural areas whenever I disclosed that I was not breastfeeding my baby during fieldwork. As diverse people tried to reason with me about the advantages of breastfeeding, they always mentioned its ability to prevent conception. My husband was openly cautioned about the possibility of my immediate conception after our daughter's birth because I was not breastfeeding.

In one urban focus group discussion held among female members of a youth group, female circumcision was mentioned as a form of contraception, leading to a debate. Some members challenged its safety. Other discussants countered by confirming the popular reason given by adherents and promoters of female genital mutilation, that it actually controls female sexual desire – therefore reducing the potential to engage in sexual activity that would result into pregnancy<sup>9</sup>.

## **8.2 STIs and HIV/AIDS**

Several urban youths reported that they do discuss HIV/AIDS in their groups, in their cliques, with friends as well as with their sexual partners. However, in stark contrast, there were some rural communities where youth participants reported that they did not discuss HIV/AIDS because they did not know what it was.

When discussing the range of topics of conversation within their sexual relationships, the majority of youths reported that they did not talk about HIV/AIDS or other STIs. For those who did, the reason was sometimes attributed to the influence of listening to anti-HIV/AIDS public health education campaigns over radio.

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<sup>9</sup> I was warned against investigating about female genital cutting, at the beginning of my research in The Gambia, by a mentor who had spent almost a decade in Farafenni working as a gynaecologist and researcher. It was particularly dangerous for me as an uncircumcised African woman because circumcisers could possibly forcibly circumcise me. So I steered away from this topic. However see appendix 15 for literature review.

Madina: Here, we do not talk about AIDS because we don't know it. (**Jericho Wollof FGD Female**)

Some couples advise each other especially because of all the radio messages. (**NYSS tailoring school**)

Generally, when discussing their knowledge about HIV/AIDS many rural participants revealed that they had heard a lot about AIDS but had never seen anyone with the infection.

Int: Is AIDS common here?

Kara: No, because I have never heard of anyone with it.

Minatou: No, because we don't hear of it.

Kumba: I don't know who has got it. I have never heard it from anybody.

Zaina: And me too, the same.

Transmission modes were well known by most of the youths. In addition to unprotected sexual contact with an infected person, participants reported non-sexual routes of infection including sharing sharp piercing instruments like razorblades, needles, injections in hospital, etc. Transfusions were rarely mentioned, and only in urban-based data. Vertical transmission from mothers to infants during birth or breastfeeding was only discussed among youths who were also PLWHAs.

There was an evident disparity between youths in school, those who attended or belonged to youth organisations including community-based organisations, faith-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and international youth associations, and those who did not. There were differences in exposure to anti-HIV/AIDS sex-education, levels of appropriating the reality of HIV/AIDS, in the utilisation, ingestion and application of available SRH interventions. Likewise there were also rural- urban disparities because many sexual and reproductive health programmes were centrally located in the Kombos and Banjul. For example the only two active PLWHA associations at the time of fieldwork were both in Kombos, therefore largely accessible to urban-dwellers. Consequently the available sexual and reproductive health programmes were mostly organised for and targeted to the urban core areas,



largely leaving out the peripheral rural areas. Furthermore none of the youths in the study ever mentioned Stepping Stones as a source of sex education, although the achievements of this community-based education programme in The Gambia is often flaunted as a major success story. I asked about Stepping Stones when I revisited the study areas in March and April 2008, and again, none of the youths knew about it<sup>10</sup>.

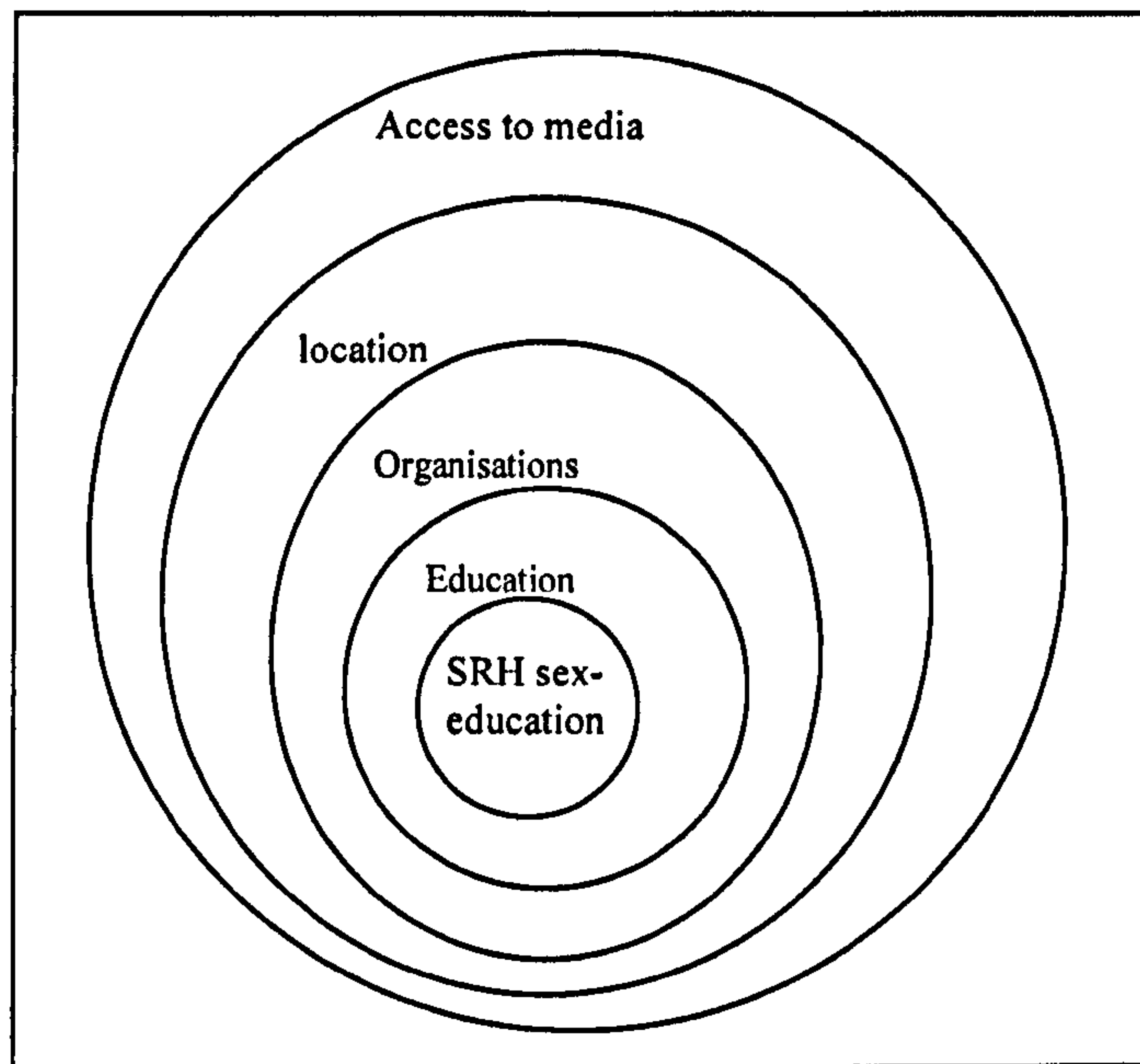
### **8.2.1 An example of Youths from Lend a Hand Society**

During a focus group discussion with participants who belonged to LAHS, there was clearly depth of knowledge about the basics of transmission, prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS. Often they interlaced their responses with statistics especially about prevalence of HIV/AIDS in their country, or in Africa. Data from both the youths and the youth workers revealed that this youth NGO regularly scheduled and facilitated public health educators who came and interacted with, exposed and empowered the youth members with sexual health education. In addition to providing school fees, support with scholastic materials, edutainment, leisure activities, capacity and skills building, hospital fees when necessary, LAHS also provided a range of SRH services to its youth members, particularly education, guidance and counselling. Therefore these youths readily supplied us with the correct information about the basic questions we asked. They were thoroughly exposed to the ABCs as packaged in the prevailing discourse and rhetoric of public health education.

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<sup>10</sup> This highlights how a project that is piloted in a small area of a country can be misrepresented to apply to the whole context. Stepping Stones was initially piloted in 1997 in Kiang with 563 people aged fifteen or more years from two test and two control villages. It was rolled out to 120 villages between 2003-2005. A further roll-out was planned to 225 more villages.

*Figure 8.2 Factors affecting proximity to SRH education*



While this high level of knowledge and awareness was commendable (particularly in comparison to that of other youth sub-groups), I was struck by the dogmatic repetition of facts that were not necessarily digested and teased apart in ways that made it specifically relevant, applicable or meaningful to the individual youths or their sub-cultural groups. There was an apparent lack of questioning of the practicality or reality behind the facts that the youths spewed with impressive accuracy. Take for example the assumptions embedded within this statement culled from a discussion about the routes of transmission of HIV in the country.

‘... and also through blood transfusion. But that way of blood transfusion is not common in The Gambia because all blood that will be transferred... I mean, all blood that will be given to another person will be well-screened. So there is no possibility of having AIDS through blood transfusions in The Gambia. The most common one is through sexual intercourse or through unsterilised instruments...’ (**LAHS FGD mixed group**)

None of the other participants contested the assumptions. No one questioned the logic behind them. No one quizzed how the blood screening was done such that it was so thorough given the health systems



challenges in the country. No one wondered how blood transfusions actually happened<sup>11</sup>. And yet the different group discussions we had with the youth members of this association were often packed with debate, tension and contradiction when discussing their personal day-to-day experiences. Drawing from their lived realities, and experiences, they questioned and debated each other's responses, contributions and stories. However, they did not dare question the widely broadcast public health rhetoric and discourse. Was this an issue of the performance of an allegiance to the growing hegemony of public health discourse in society? Was this a case of 'powerful knowledge that could not be touched'?

As I observed this total acceptance – without reflection or critique – of standardized public health education messages, I began to wonder about the differences in reception, interpretation and treatment of received knowledge. Why is it that these intelligent educated youths soaked up everything that was issued from the public health education stands, and yet they dared poke holes in their own stories? What was the source of power behind the public health education discourse? How could this power be enhanced to impact the choices and actions of youths?

### **8.2.2 Metaphors of HIV/AIDS, sexuality and place**

There were also many cases of externalisation and disassociation. HIV infection belonged to other people or societies, not their own (see chapter 9, Nyanzi, Bah and Joof 2007). When asked whether HIV/AIDS was common in their area, many participants reported that it was not. Their statements were frequently backed with the reason that they had never seen an actual person with the infection.

Mousa: HIV/AIDS is not common here. It is common in other countries. (Boy NYSS)

The predominant discourse among rural youths relating to the existence of HIV/AIDS was acceptance of health education narratives propagated in the media or through drama and IEC rallies held in the villages. Many youths distanced themselves or members of their immediate social environment from the disease –

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. with chapter 8 where I discuss my experience of almost getting transfused with HIV-infected O+ blood in a private biomedical facility in The Gambia.

speaking about it in metaphors of urbanity and a stereotypical urban sexuality which was projected as a consequence of central locus.

HIV/AIDS was often denied in local gossip, chat, and conversations. However in formal interviews, the participants tended to gauge the researcher's expected answers and reply normatively. Generally many participants reported that beyond the classroom lessons and public health education outreach, STIs were uncommon. Syphilis, chancroid, HIV/AIDS, gonorrhoea were well-known by students who always ran through the list when asked to mention what STIs they knew. However, beyond the names, many did not know the signs and symptoms of these infections. There were evident disparities between rural and urban youths. Rural ones only frequently mentioned HIV/AIDS, perhaps as a result of new media campaigns.

Two rare "STIs" were mentioned in the entire data set from qualitative methods.

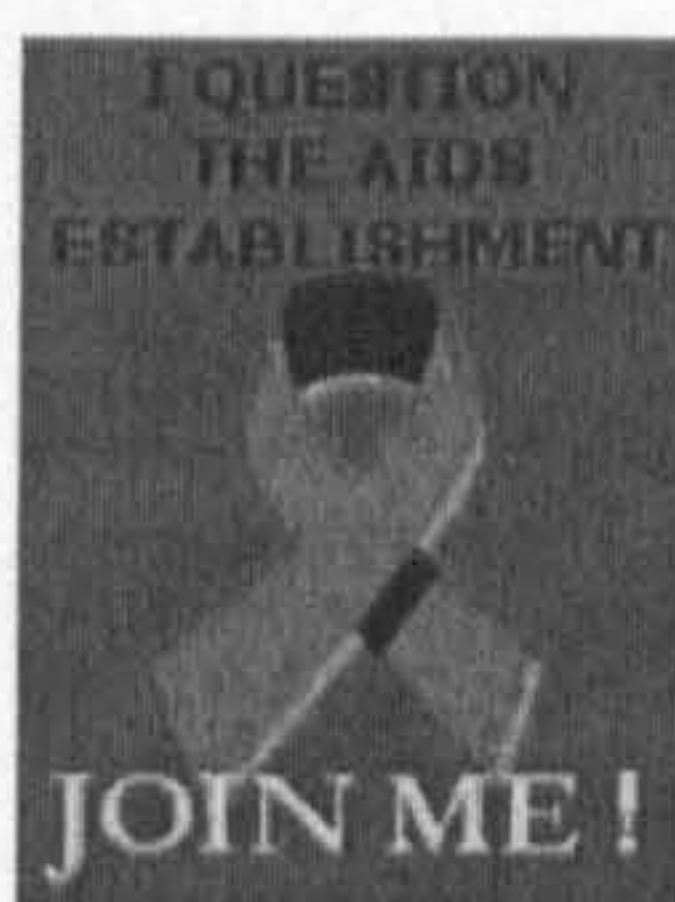
Ali: There is an STD we call dirty class. A man or woman has lice in their private parts. So when that guy goes into sexual relationship then those lice will transfer to another partner. **(LAHS )**

Matarr: And also there is another one which they call yellow fever. This one also is a sexually transmitted disease. There are two types of yellow fever. One which is caused by a mosquito.

There is another yellow fever which is an STD. **(Tallinding FGD)**

Perhaps the reference to yellow fever transmitted through sex was a misconception? A follow up interview with this particular youth who mentioned it confirmed he had heard about another youth whose skin, eyes and urine turned yellow because he had an STI from a visiting Guinean girl.





## ***Chapter 9: A note on diverse deniers of HIV/AIDS in The Gambia***

*...This country was once thought to have a rather enlightened and educated view of AIDS. Unfortunately, change is afoot. The number of people infected with HIV could soon escalate because those diagnosed with the disease rarely disclose their status to their partners, there appears to be a steady rise in the sexual abuse of minors, and 'false hope' is being perpetuated by the powers that be.*

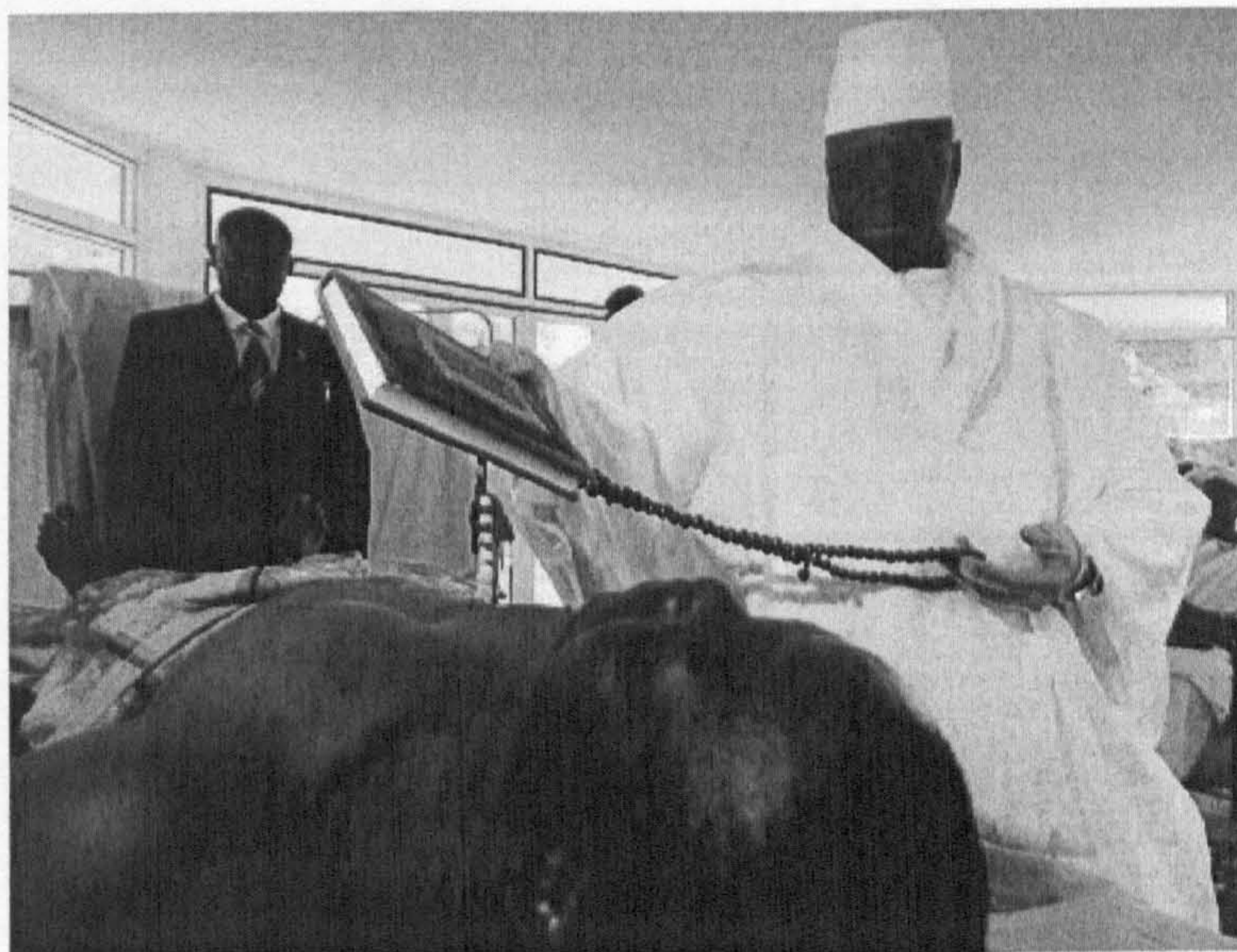
*In January, the president, His Excellency Colonel (retired) Doctor (honorary degree) El Hajj Yahya Jammeh, proclaimed that he could personally cure those with AIDS in three to thirty days by using secret herbal formulas and reciting verses from the Qur'an. The president, backed by his health minister Dr Tamsir Mbowe, claimed that his cure is 100% effective and refuses to allow anyone to investigate the secret ingredients in his 'wonder drug'. According to Mbowe, the secret ingredients are Jammeh's 'family knowledge of traditional medicine' and 'the teachings of the holy Qur'an'.*

*This is a small country in crisis. Every year the wildlife shrinks and the water quality and the soil fertility decline. Every other month another politician or journalist or civil servant is arrested. Every week the mounds of litter grow larger and larger. And now, every Thursday young and old, female and male, wait for the president's touch, the president's prayers, the president's secret formula to cure them from AIDS. Giving up their anti-retroviral medicines and subjecting themselves to the president's cure, those with HIV or AIDS are probably being given false hope. And, if they believe themselves to be cured, they will innocently spread the disease further. Starin (2007a:294)*



On January 17, 2007, the President of The Gambia declared on local, national and international press media that he had a divinely revealed cure for HIV/AIDS. I was in Uganda, deep into my writing-up. With dismay, I followed online the progress of his screening and recruitment of ‘batches’ of PLWHAs to begin his treatment. With horror, I saw men and women whom I had lived with; shared food, fun and stories of their experiences with receiving and living with an HIV+ve test result – submitting to Yahya Jammeh’s ministrations. These widely publicised claims of healing HIV/AIDS by Gambia’s president marked a shift from diverse forms of denial to dissent in public discourse. However unlike science-based dissenters (e.g. Duesberg 1991, 1996, Craddock 1996, Lauer 2006, 2007), the Gambian paradigm was established within the claims of a megalomaniac and quack *marabout*.

*Figure 9.1 Jammeh healing HIV/AIDS with Qur'an and prayer beads*



In this chapter I describe my interpretations of local reactions to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Through ethnographic scenarios, I reflect on diverse levels of denial of the presence and inherent reality of HIV and/ or AIDS in The Gambian context.



### ***9.1 HIV/AIDS in The Gambia***

In response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, WHO and UNAIDS launched in 2001 the 3 by 5 initiative, with the goal of providing antiretroviral therapy (ART) to three million people in developing countries by the year 2005. According to Schim van der Loeff et al.'s (2003) survey carried out in 2000/2001 among pregnant women attending antenatal clinics, the prevalence of HIV-1 was estimated at 1.1% and the prevalence of HIV-2 at 0.8%. The rate of HIV-1 was almost doubled compared to the results of a similar study conducted five years before, whereas HIV-2 showed no significant increase. At present, about 8000 people in The Gambia are infected with HIV-1 and around 7000 people with HIV-2.

In 2000, the Gambian government obtained US\$ 15 million dollars from the World Bank to fund a comprehensive project to address the increasing problem of HIV/AIDS in the country: the HIV/AIDS Rapid Response Project (HARRP). Further funds were granted by the Global Fund to support interventions to improve the standard of care for PLWHAs, including reinforcement of voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) and prevention-of-mother-to-child-transmission (PTCT) programmes and introduction of ART. The goal set by the programme is to provide ART to at least 50% of people who need it by 2008. Presently there are three health centres providing HIV/AIDS-related healthcare services, namely MRC Clinic Fajara, Hands on Care Project – Brikama, and Royal Victoria Hospital in Banjul. According to an evaluation of retained knowledge after training offered to a group of 21 healthcare workers in how to facilitate and provide healthcare – specifically ART - for PLWHA, (see Lasio 2004), there is an urgent need within The Gambian system of health service delivery to empower healthcare workers with skills, knowledge, equipment, and confidence required for working with PLWHAs.

However in the light of the presidential claims of healing HIV/AIDS, and his strict insistence that his patients refrain from taking antiretroviral therapies, gains made in biomedical and public health efforts to control the disease may be offset in the near future. The playing out of this clash between the biomedical and local appreciations of a sexual health issue, could reshape the sexual terrain in The

Gambia. One site with evidence of this clash, is those who deny the reality of HIV/AIDS in the Gambian context.

## ***9.2 Enactments and articulations of denial***

The denial<sup>1</sup> of HIV/AIDS used to be a thing for the illiterate, backward, poor, uneducated, diseased, low developing countries, those up-to-no-good, and understandably those immediately diagnosed with HIV infection. However many current developments in the developed world – be they academic, economic, biomedical, or physical within individuals – have led to a rapidly growing group of HIV/AIDS deniers<sup>2</sup> that is starting to resemble a movement. In the public image, this movement has two main icons namely Professor Peter H. Duesberg<sup>3</sup>, a molecular biologist at the University of California, and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa. One represents academic dissent, the other political dissent. Between these is a growing group of dissenting scientists from a variety of disciplines, journalists, critical fiction writers, patients diagnosed with ‘HIV’, their carers, those with AIDS defining conditions, activist organisations – most significant of which are Health Education AIDS Liaison (HEAL)<sup>4</sup>, Alive and Well, South Africa’s

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<sup>1</sup> While denial can be abstract at an ideological level or an epistemological stance, its importance for me is the diverse ways it (often unintentionally) affects ordinary life for (variously marginalised) people who may or may not be deniers of HIV/AIDS. I am particularly interested in how the academic choices about knowledge of a powerful elite minority greatly impacts the life and substance of ordinary (mostly unlettered) men and women, boys and girls. Such choices include questions such as: What knowledge is valued? What knowledge is challenged or dispel? How are contrasting positions about a topic negotiated? In what circumstances is scientific knowledge appropriated and validated? Why? How? By whom? When is it otherwise rubbished or challenged? And why? How? By whom? How are these contradictions mediated and embraced by individuals 1) to themselves? 2) to others in their inner circles? 3) to others who are outsiders? And why? Also, how do those with power validate, appropriate, and impose different bodies of knowledge onto less powerful others?

<sup>2</sup> Self-declared dissidents include Peter Duesberg, Stephen Davis, Casper Schmidt, Eleni Popdopulos-Eleopulos, John Lauritsen, Davis Rasnick, Robert Root-Bernstein, Robert Willner, Mark Craddock, Harry Haverkos, Kary Mullis, Celia Farber, Gordon Stewart, Serge Lang, Neville Hodgkinson, Ian Young, Robert Giraldo, Rebecca Culshaw, Henry Bauer, Liam Scheff, Richard Strohmar, Jonathan Fishbein, Anthony Brink, Helen Lauer, Harvey Bialy, etc – all experts in their respective fields of operation.

<sup>3</sup> For details of his work and arguments against the HIV=AIDS thesis see, [www.duesberg.com](http://www.duesberg.com), [www.virusmyth.com](http://www.virusmyth.com), [www.duesberg.org](http://www.duesberg.org).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.healids.com](http://www.healids.com) or [www.healtoronto.com](http://www.healtoronto.com) for examples of their many websites.



Treatment Information Group (TIG)<sup>5</sup>, and the Group for the Scientific Reappraisal of the HIV/AIDS Hypothesis (refer to Baumann et al. 1995)<sup>6</sup>.

Literature review clearly reveals that the dissidents are not homogenous. Based on re-examinations of published scientific research, many argue that a) HIV does not cause AIDS, b) the present HIV test does not diagnose the presence of the virus but its antibodies and is therefore not proof that one has the virus, c) the antiretroviral therapies given to people diagnosed with AIDS such as AZT (zidovudine) or nevirapine (viramune) cause AIDS due to toxicity. Their logic and arguments go against everything that mainstream HIV/AIDS research is about. Basically they question the very basis of the HIV/AIDS industry.

So convincing did I find the presentations of these dissidents that I was reduced to a panicky state of near-crisis midway through my thesis writing because I began to seriously question what I was doing after considering their arguments and evidence. I took a long break from writing up my work. I almost deserted my PhD... I was perplexed, confused, excited and afraid – at the same time. I questioned. I cried. I laughed. I talked with people. And then I questioned some more. In retrospect, I guess it was good for me in many respects. And it helped me to determine to keep going on doing what I do best: social science research. It also reemphasised to me the importance of other disciplines such as virology and microbiology, and it re-highlighted for me the limitations of my discipline.

As I returned to my writing-up I reflected on the contradictions in my responses to the different forms of denial I witnessed. While I responded very powerfully to the scientific evidence that backed the arguments of academic dissidents, I also had always reviled the denial of politicians, journalists, and silently pooh-poohed that of ordinary people whom I encountered on a daily basis while in the field in The Gambia. When it was Thabo Mbeki and Yahya Jammeh, I was angered largely because as presidents they had the power to influence public policy. When it was ordinary villagers, elders, youths and

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<sup>5</sup> Spearheaded by Anthony Brink TIG was reported to sue Zackie Achmat of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) for genocide and direct role in the deaths of many South Africans from antiretroviral poisoning (see [www.tig.org.za](http://www.tig.org.za), [www.virusmyth.net/aids/index/abrink.htm](http://www.virusmyth.net/aids/index/abrink.htm)).

<sup>6</sup> For details refer to <http://www.rethinkingaids.com>, <http://www.hiv-aids-factorfraud.com>, <http://www.helpforhiv.com>.

children in The Gambia, I sometimes laughed, challenging them for more information, or worked hard to convince them by narrating examples of people I had watched enduring HIV/AIDS among my family, friends, or countrymen in Uganda (see also Paine et al. (2002) for a discussion of scepticism about the existence of HIV/AIDS even among people who were knowledgeable about the disease in Gambian villages). But when I met some die-hard denialists in The Gambia, their stance sometimes had immense effects on the decisions and actions they took – affecting not only their individual life, but also the lives of those around them who did not necessarily also oppose the existence of HIV/AIDS.

### **9.2.1 Almost transfused with HIV!**

After thirteen slow and dramatic hours of labour, a caesarean section, and the successful delivery of my first daughter, I was wheeled unconscious into room F4-3, of Ndebaan Clinic Bakau. I was critically in need of at least two pints of blood. Unknown to me, my mother<sup>7</sup> had battled against the clinic staff by repeatedly insisting she would not consent for me to get transfused with blood that had not been freshly screened.

‘I have been donating blood since 1986 to the Red Cross Blood bank in Uganda<sup>8</sup>,’ she explained. ‘We know that some blood in the bank is not clean. Some of it has got HIV. Before you transfuse my daughter with any blood, it must be cleared as safe blood.’

There was no end to the gossip and chatter among the midwives, nurses and other junior staff members, as they later recounted the story of the Old Ma who told the doctors off about blood having HIV. They seemed genuinely shocked that an elderly African woman could challenge a surgeon’s directive, argue with the strict Senior Sister who dressed in a smart white uniform with matching white

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<sup>7</sup> My mother travelled from Uganda to The Gambia a few days before my baby’s birth. Even though I did the early stages of antenatal care at the University College Hospital in London, I later chose to utilise my pregnancy experience to participate as a client in the reproductive health services in The Gambia. My mother, who was initially supposed to join me in the United Kingdom lovingly offered to come to The Gambia when my plans changed.

<sup>8</sup> Unlike several other countries in sub-Saharan Africa which neither have established blood banks, nor have free donation of blood services by volunteer donors, Uganda has got a mature blood bank with screening services and regular donation campaigns. Donors can claim blood in cases of emergency. This was not the case in The Gambia, otherwise I would have had access to readily available blood because I had previously donated to the Gambian Blood Group at Kanilai during the Cultural week in 2003.



canvas shoes and a tiny white cap delicately held on her plaited hair, and insist on seeing a chit from a blood laboratory clearing the blood I was to be given.

'Ah, we do not have HIV as a problem in this country,' the jolly white-haired surgeon declared loudly when I later followed this issue up with him. 'They say that almost 1.7% of Gambians are infected with this HIV. If you count the numbers... I mean, we are one point two or three million people. If you count 1.7% of this number, you will get around... um umm,' he muttered as he bent his head to one side to indicate he was conducting some mental sums. 'It is impossible. Fucking fucking impossible,' he said. 'Where are all those fourteen thousand... or two thousand-something people with HIV? Some crazy wacky scientist pumped with Western money is forging things. We do not have all those people with HIV in this country.' On and on he rumbled about the impossibility of the country having such proportions of HIV-infected people.

After three years of living and working with diverse healthcare providers in The Gambia, I had become resigned to hearing this blatant denial of HIV as a serious health issue in the country. The impact of the politics of acknowledging or denying the presence of HIV/AIDS in a country affects the lives of ordinary men, women, girls and boys. In this instance, I was dragged right into the midst of the drama. It was not another life out there, another statistic, another woman needing blood after protracted labour and caesarean section. It was *me*, an ethnographer involved in research about sexuality and reproductive health of youths in The Gambia. The performances of power, the choices that were made, the processes of these choices, and the potential life-altering blunders that could have been made, opened my understanding to the critical impact a complacent attitude among healthcare providers can have on less powerful women and families.

My mother put off the surgeon's decision of immediate transfusion until the blood had been cleared in a laboratory that was authorised to screen blood. Luckily enough for me, my husband's blood group is O+ like me. So we agreed he would donate one pint of blood to me. However before doing this, he rushed to the National blood screening laboratory at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Banjul which is a thirty minutes' drive away from Ndebaan Clinic Bakau, where I was admitted.

After several hours of trying to locate the laboratory technician, he contacted him and discovered he was an Old Boy, from the same high school. After renewing their ties of acquaintance, as custom demanded, my husband presented his urgent request. He explained that his wife had lost a considerable amount of blood during labour. Thank God the baby and the wife were fine. However, the doctors said she urgently needed two pints of blood, before they could discharge her from hospital. The problem was that the wife's mother had insisted that only screened blood would be put into her daughter's body. So my husband, implored his 'Gambian brother' to help him screen the available O+ blood.

My husband was shocked at the results of the screening. All O+ blood that was available in the blood bank was infected with HIV. The laboratory technician hand-wrote a brief chit to explain to the clinic staff why he could not send them any blood.

### **9.2.2 'Malaria is an issue, but HIV...why waste resources?'**

The denial described above was nothing new to me in my fieldwork in The Gambia. Instead, it was just another confirmation of what seemed an intrinsic attitude of many established health-workers in the country. It echoed the response I first encountered among officials in the health ministry, early on in my fieldwork.

After numerous failed attempts, I was finally able to get an audience with Dr. Sam, of the DOSH&SW<sup>9</sup> in December 2003. With offices at the Quadrangle in Banjul, Dr. Sam was responsible for managing, administering, directing and putting his signature onto any and all important matters pertaining to health in The Gambia. Although healthcare services are decentralised and effected through a three-tiered primary healthcare system, health systems management and administration, health policy formulation and implementation, and the design and delivery of healthcare programmes is highly centralised. Decision-making power is principally located at DOSH&SW. Thus I learnt that I needed to process ethical approval for my research by presenting a proposal to the joint DOSH&SW and MRC Science and ethics review board. Arranging a meeting with Dr. Sam entailed several phone-calls, visits,

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<sup>9</sup> Abbreviation for Department of State for Health and Social Welfare – the ministry of health.



long waits in corridors or a waiting-room, and re-scheduling with different 'secretaries'. These public employees were buxom ladies who chatted at length with friends and relatives on the office phone, filed their nails while talking with official visitors, met en masse with their visitors – occupying office space and furniture. They seemed to come to office to idle the hours away, and they seemed intent on keeping visitors away from Dr. Sam. One of them asked me to pay fifty *dalasis* so that she could tell me when he would actually be coming into office.

Eventually, on this particular occasion, my sister Susan and I got a thirty-minute audience with Dr. Sam, after sitting in a waiting-room for three hours. The deep-maroon cushioned sofa-set in his inner office was impressive. There were heaps of papers all over his desk. He was evidently nursing a hang-over.

After salutations, introductions and explanations of who I was, my mission to The Gambia to process ethics clearance and research permits, I launched into an explanation of my proposed study. While he was receptive and engaged with us in dialogue, Dr. Sam was also adamant about the lack of a need for research on sexuality, and the issue of HIV/AIDS among youths in The Gambia.

'We do not have an HIV/AIDS problem in this country. Malaria, we know. Tuberculosis, yes. Problems of maternal mortality, yes. Childhood illnesses, yes. But this AIDS is not an issue here. Why would you need to focus on this non-issue?' he asked.

'Because it is important to focus on this window of advantage given your country's low levels of HIV. It would be interesting to study the relationship between the sexual culture of the youths here and the low levels of HIV. It would be an interesting answer to give to countries like South Africa which are trying to change the sexual behaviour of their young people who are dying each day of AIDS,' I said.

'The point is you could focus on other things. You come all the way from Uganda to research sexual behaviour and AIDS of our youths! Why The Gambia? I am not convinced about your study. Because our country here does not have an AIDS problem. Why the Gambia?' he asked again.

Back and forth we rallied; he insisting that The Gambia had no HIV/AIDS problem and was thereby inappropriate for our study, and we on the other hand labouring to justify the relevance,

significance, rationale and timeliness of the study. It was a tough meeting. It was tense. And it tested my tact. Thankfully, Susan had highly developed skills of diplomacy and negotiation. She successfully cajoled from Dr. Sam a list of names of other DOSH&SW officials who also sat on the ethics review board. It was to these (particularly Dr. Jallow) that we turned for advice about how to proceed.

As fieldwork progressed, the official and public discourse of DOSH&SW officials about the presence of HIV/AIDS in The Gambia drastically changed from one of outright denial as exemplified by Dr. Sam above, to one of openness to the possibility. Events in international healthcare as well as massive financing for anti-HIV/AIDS prevention-focussed interventions, voluntary counselling and testing for HIV, and care for AIDS sufferers dictated that nations in denial changed their official stance in order to access these resources. However, even as recently as January 2006, I found that the public rhetoric and official statements dished out to the largely foreign-based audiences was not necessarily similar to what individuals within DOSH&SW said and believed.

### **9.2.3 Flaunting holiday sex, but denying HIV/AIDS**

‘Hello ma! Welcome to The Gambia. I hope you travelled well. Okay. I am Yankuba. I can give you a good holiday time full of sounds, sights, culture and a great romance.’

‘Oh yeah?’ I listened some more.

‘Yes, a holiday full of love,’ the crazy young man with perfect English, and a fake flashing smile replied unabashedly.

Previously I hurried away from these ‘hustlers’, believing the local gossip that they were nuisances out to make some *dalasis* from unsuspecting tourists and foreigners keen to meet the locals. In the past, I avoided these scheming youths who were strategically positioned around and about the arrivals section of Yumtum International Airport. After the hassle of traversing immigration and customs at the airport (see Nyanzi 2004), I decided I could not handle the deceitful conniving and unsolicited advances of a *bumster* (Nyanzi et al. 2005).



However, since gaining a keen ethnographic interest in exploring the individual, social and sexual lives of *bumsters*, I changed my position and instead decided to linger awhile to entertain these airport touts. And so I played along, pretending to fall for the smooth talk and pledges of holiday love and adventure, etc. We talked about the sacred crocodile pools at Katchikally and Katong Folonko, the mystical stone circles at Wassu, the historical slave trade fort at James Island where slaves stayed before getting shipped off across the Atlantic ocean, the tourist craft markets in Bakau, Banjul and Brikama, the booming nightlife in Senegambia, the inland camping resort at Tendaba, and even bird-watching – all the touristy things thrown at adventurers seeking the exotic experience.

After some time, when I was sure the *bumster* was convinced that my interest in his lies was genuine, I unflinchingly dropped the line:

‘But what if I have HIV/AIDS. Are you still interested?’

Blank stares. Incredulous grins. Outright shock. Humorous expressions. Reactions varied. But there was always disbelief, doubt and denial. I played this role so many times, that I got used to the part.

‘What? What did you say?’

‘You have AIDS? No I don’t think so.’

‘You cannot be serious. You, looking good like this? You don’t have it.’

‘Stop joking...’

‘But you do not look sick. I do not believe you.’

Over the years, my interactions and observations with these airport *bumsters*<sup>10</sup> steadily built up, providing me with the opportunity to actually simultaneously participate as a recipient of their attention, as well as to interview them about diverse aspects of their lives. I asked them about where to purchase condoms, whether they used them, where to buy sex, how to know who was selling sex, homosexuality, connections to pimps, appropriate dress, holiday sex, perspectives on alcohol, where to get weed, police

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<sup>10</sup> Many of them used the airport in transit to greener pastures. Their group composition constantly changed, with a greater influx corresponding to the tourist season – particularly on days when Western-based charter flights arrived full of eager tourists seeking the sun, sea or seasonal sex. While policemen targeted *bumsters* on the beaches, they did not reach the airport.

intervention in the illicit trade of sex in the tourism industry, polygyny, etc. It was interesting that even though many advertised their willingness to provide sexual services to visiting tourists, they mostly denied that HIV/AIDS was a reality. That a 'healthy looking' woman was openly admitting to have HIV/AIDS - even as a supposition - was always perceived as a joke to them.

#### **9.2.4 'In all my travels, I haven't met anyone with AIDS'**

'I have been to many places in the world, going on missions of peace-keeping. Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cassamance, even up to DRC... travelling by land, by sea and by air. But then I have never seen anyone with this AIDS. People have plenty of fun and pleasure, sexing this one and that one, but they do not get sick. You see some men loving a different woman in every different town we go to. And many of us don't believe in sex with these rubbers because it is not the same sex. Like washing your feet with socks on, haha. But there is no sign of sickness. For me, I do not believe these rumours and inventions of America. It is just propaganda. It is not true. If it is true, then they made the virus in the laboratories as a biological weapon. But I do not believe it.'

Immaculately dressed in civilian clothes and sipping *Julbrew* – a locally produced beer sold in green bottles, this officer in the Gambian National Army proudly stated his disbelief in the reality of HIV/AIDS, based on travel and exposure to priapic men. He agreed to be interviewed, as long as his identity was concealed. From previous interactions, I had established his widespread knowledge of African political history, current affairs, international market economy and local Gambian politics. He spoke good English, without the characteristic grammatical errors and misuse of gender identifiers that were common to many other Gambians (see also Long 1992).

He was interested in my research after hearing from youth participants in a FGD held in Kotu – a newly established coastal residential area for the well-to-do strata of urban society. His major reason for seeking me out was apparently to dispel any beliefs I may have had about the reality of HIV/AIDS beyond defamatory Western propaganda designed to dupe Africa. Similar to many youths I met during the course of my fieldwork, this military respondent was blatant in his denial of the reality of HIV.



'AIDS just stands for America's Idea for Discouraging Sex,' he said to me, repeating a popular rendering of the acronym. 'Don't believe their propaganda'.

#### **9.2.5 Face to face with Gambian PLWHAs**

While preparing for participant observation and interviews with PLWHAs, I seriously considered who would work with me as research assistants. I focussed on any preparations for fieldwork I may need to provide them, be it mental, practical, or academic. In retrospect, I was more interested that the team would fit in with the PLWHAs, and interact with them with tact; balancing openness and sensitivity. Having picked it up from their conversations with me, I took for granted my research assistants' acceptance of HIV/AIDS as a real phenomenon.

However during feedback, debriefing sessions and from their field-notes, I quickly realised a paradox of responses. On the surface, all was well. We met the PLWHAs, had introductory meetings, participatory planning sessions for actual fieldwork, and then spent a period of intensive data collection using participant observation, individual interviews and focus group discussions. We had eight follow-up interviews with members to clarify some information, and a continuous repeat interaction with key informants from the association. However, going beyond the public presentation, my research assistants recorded shock at the realisation that 'normal-looking Gambians' claimed to be HIV-infected. The nights during this phase of field-work Ousman Bah had nightmares with emaciated bodies covered in ulcers, burials, injections. He fell ill with a fever, immediately after the fieldwork.

'It is not like I imagined it to be. I was thinking of seeing people in their beds, too weak to stand alone, running stomachs, skin rashes, bony structures – you know like they show us on the videos about prevention. This is very scary because it means that normal people we see walking around everyday could actually have this HIV. All those beautiful women..., tsk tsk,' he brooded.

Aligning the actuality of what he encountered with the stereotypical public images of a wasted battered and degenerating body, festering with pain and illness was difficult for him.

Perhaps beyond this shock was also a fear interwoven with an awareness of the potential danger involved in 'sex with partners one does not know well. These people look very well! The women are beautiful and have no mark or sign of infection. It is true but it is hard to believe! It means that anyone could have it. Anyone...' he said.

As I listened to the debriefing comments, I realised that mass repetition of anti-HIV/AIDS public health education slogans such as 'You can't tell who is infected with HIV by just looking. Go for VCT!' did not necessarily relate to knowing, appreciating, or comprehending the reality behind these words. It took meeting PLWHAs to make these facts meaningful.

Immediately after, I remember Ousman in deep conversation with Kekuta who was transcribing and translating the recorded interviews.

'Did you really see these people who say that they have AIDS?' Kekuta asked.

'Heh boy, it is true! After I saw them, I decided to zip up my trousers, keep my boxer-shorts on unless and only when I am with my wife!'

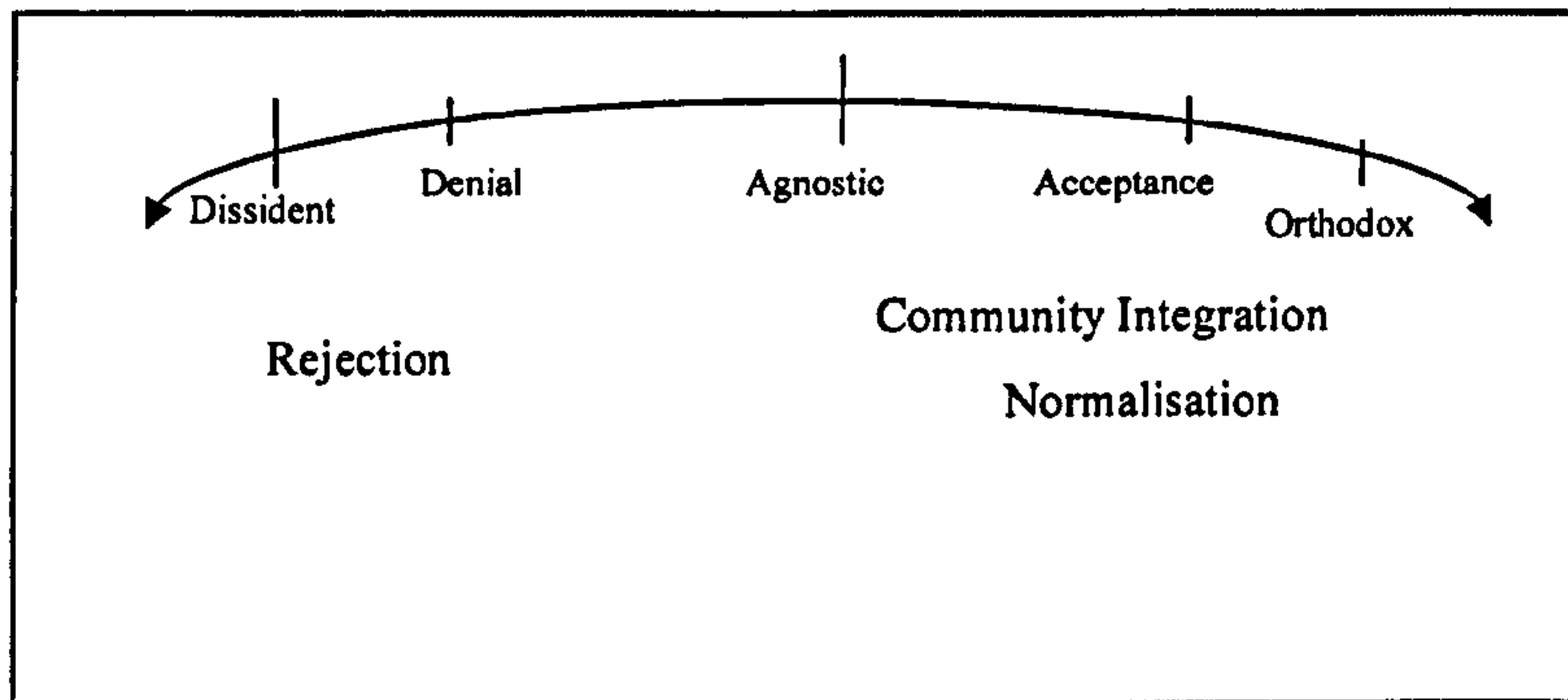
He did not only stop at preaching against HIV infection to Kekuta, he went about for weeks telling anyone he encountered about the reality of HIV in The Gambia. He had a new boldness when his peers and family challenged him with claims about propaganda. It was as though the final ounce of denial in him was removed by the MEANING brought through actually meeting with PLWHAs.

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There are different forms of acceptance and denial of the reality of HIV/AIDS as both a bodily experience and a social phenomenon that individuals and societies have to deal with. While there has been a lot of previous focus on denial and its resultant consequences such as stigmatisation, ostracism, marginalisation in society, discrimination, separatist policies that further alienate HIV-infected people and programmes that are selective, much less work has been done on the reverse notion of acceptance. Does this imply an absence of examples of acceptance? Or is this perhaps another area where social science's preoccupation with the bad, problematic and negative is evident?



*Figure 9.2 A continuum of responses to HIV/AIDS*



As illustrated in the ethnographic narratives presented in this chapter, responses to HIV/AIDS were often varied, shifting, diverse, and complex. They were characterised by ambivalence. While there is a tendency for programmes and policy to characterise these responses as either acceptance or denial, dissidence or orthodoxy, the dynamics of the lived realities of local Gambians were far more complex than this binary opposition. There were shades and layers of both denial and acceptance. Was it possible that these two were but response postures along the same continuum (see figure 9.2)? In fact a response from one source (be it at individual, group, community, or national level) can be a mixture of variants of different positions along the continuum. For example it was possible for my research assistants to accept the abstract academic presentation of HIV/AIDS while at the same time being shocked by interactions with PLWHAs. Likewise for Dr. Faal, who performed my caesarean section, it was acceptable that HIV/AIDS existed as a metaphor of Western propaganda, but not as a potentially transmittable virus living in the blood needed by his patient. Or the health minister, who had learnt during his medical training that HIV/AIDS was incurable, and yet endorsed and worked together with the president during his AIDS healing rituals.

For me, it was deeply insightful when I realised this disparity in reactions between my research assistants' obvious acceptance of HIV/AIDS revealed in our conversations and interactions prior to the fieldwork with PLWHAs and their trauma of coming to grips with the actuality of people infected with HIV and suffering with AIDS. I learnt that there is a difference between HIV/AIDS as a notion and

HIV/AIDS as a reality. I saw the difference between living with an abstract concept and dealing with an actuality. I witnessed fear, shock, disbelief, grief, and then resolve to change from risky sexual behaviour to safer sex. I experienced as an observer, the power of grasping the reality of HIV/AIDS by living and interacting with PLWHAs.

And I began to think about the nature and inherent power of responses to HIV/AIDS. Why did it take my research assistants meeting Gambian PLWHAs in order to uncover fear and create new commitments to safe sexual behaviour, spreading anti-HIV/AIDS health education and information to peers? Why did the interactions with PLWHAs bring about this change, especially considering that previously my research assistants lived and acted like they accepted that HIV/AIDS was real and existing? Was it possible that acceptance was a process? Could it be that there were different measures of acceptance? In fact was it possible that denial and acceptance existed simultaneously in an individual's response; that they were not mutually exclusive but could rather dwell side by side? Was there a possibility for this ambivalence beyond the level of the individual to the group, society, community, national, regional, or even international levels? My data strongly suggested this ambivalence<sup>11</sup>.

#### **9.2.6 'The government is paying PLWHA to say they have HIV!'**

Even with the coming out of some PLWHAs, many local Gambians still denied the presence of HIV/AIDS in their country. This denial was variously reported by the PLWHAs with whom I interacted during my ethnographic study.

'We do attend these workshops and present on care and support for PLWHAs in order to sensitise people and let them be aware of HIV/AIDS in the world, and in The Gambia.... But so many times you hear people saying it is not true. That the government is giving us money!'

**(SYSS FGD –Wollof)**

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<sup>11</sup> One of the possibilities for me to pursue in my post-doctorate studies, is another ethnographic investigation about this ambivalence of responses to HIV/AIDS within The Gambia, and perhaps interrogate it with available literature from other contexts.



In addition to the examples above, I also met different levels of denial among *marabouts*. When they were not advertising cures for HIV/AIDS, or attending anti-HIV/AIDS sensitisation workshops, traditional healers were variously cast in the local public media for contesting against the plausibility of ‘an illness that Allah cannot heal!’ (see also Nyanzi, Bah and Joof 2007).

## **Chapter 10: Youths negotiating sexual scripts in The Gambia**

*The idea of a script, a device for guiding action and for understanding it, is a metaphor drawn from the theatre. Viewing conduct as scripted is a way of organising our thinking about behaviour. Scripts are the plans that people may have in their heads for what they are doing and what they are going to do, as well as being devices...Scripts justify actions which are in accord with them and cause us to question those which are not... A script is simpler than the activity we perform, often more limited and schematic. It is like a blueprint or roadmap or recipe, giving directions, but not specifying everything that must be done. Regardless of its sketchiness, the script is often more important than concrete acts. It is our script that we carry from action to action, modified by our concrete acts, but not replaced by them (Gagnon 1977:6).*

In this chapter I present my grounded theory of the sexual scripts of youths in The Gambia.

### **10.1 Thesis**

*'Your thesis is a statement of your position on a particular question' (Brown 2005<sup>1</sup>).*

As intimated in chapter one, a grounded theory approach enables the 'little voices' embedded in fieldwork data to emerge, and contribute to the formulation of lay theories which are perhaps more useful to the researched communities, as well as the researcher. Therefore the ultimate goal of any academic researcher who claims to use the grounded theory approach must be the generation of a theory, or a body of theories, that are true to the voices, experiences, narratives, codes, categories, themes, interpretations and sub-theories arising from the data (Strauss and Corbin 1998, Ezzy 2002). Building upon Gagnon and Simon's (1973:19-26) sexual scripting

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<sup>1</sup> Graduate Skills Training: 'Managing and producing your thesis and reports' by Louise Brown, November 2005, University College London.



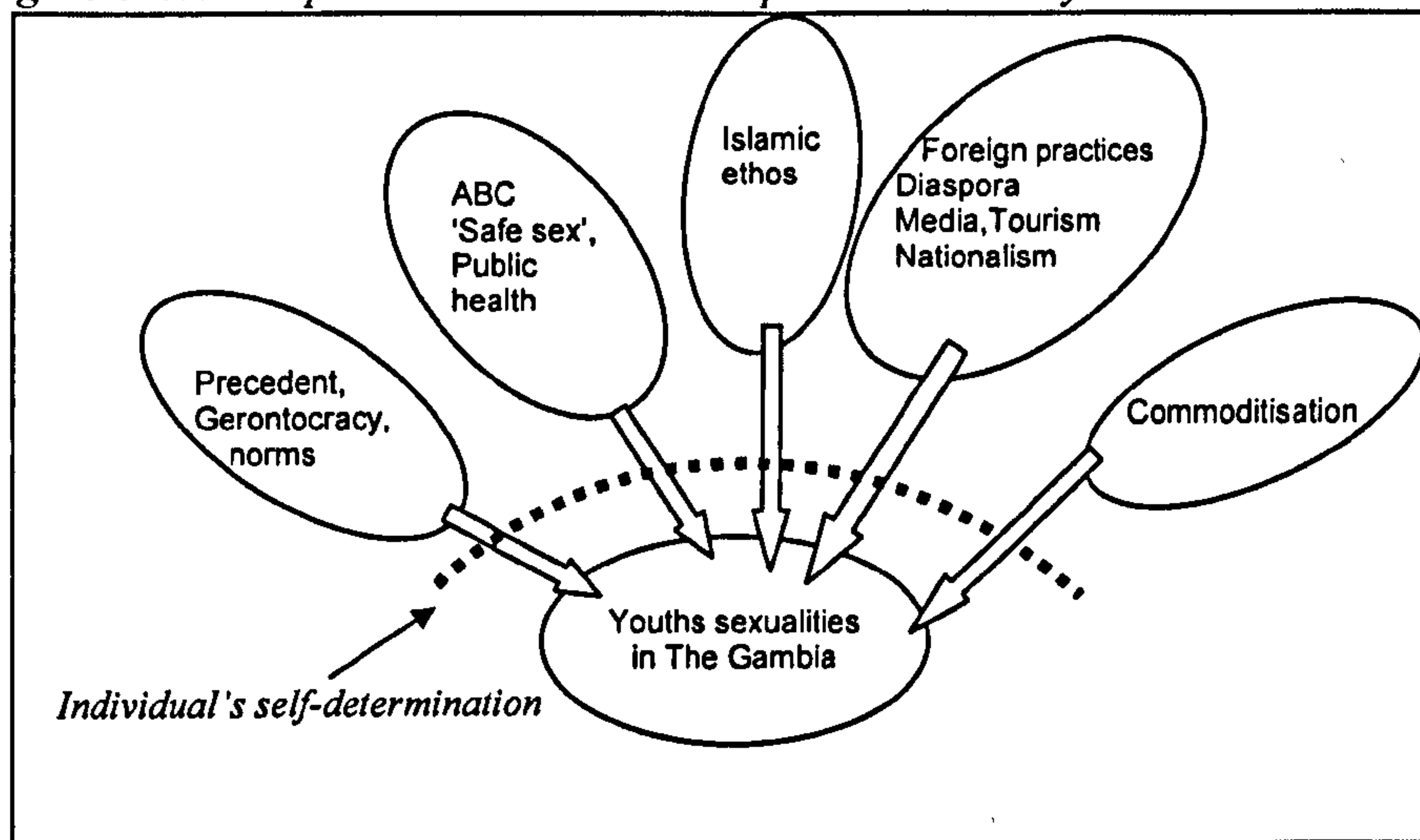
theory, one of this study's aims is to contribute to such a theorisation of sexualities among youths in The Gambia.

### ***10.2 Juggling diverse sexual scripts***

Based on my analysis in chapter two, that combined grounded theory and sexual scripting theory, I submit a theorisation of scripting youth sexualities in The Gambia (see figure 10.1). Thematic analyses based on local sexual norms and values (which made up my higher order codes in the hierarchy of relationships) embedded in the data suggest the following over-arching lay theories which are the generalised scripts:

- a) Precedent => gerontocracy, tradition, ethnicity, norms
- b) Localised Islamic ethos
- c) The ABC preventive strategy => Public health, safe sex messages, biomedical sexual and reproductive health
- d) 'The things of *gan*, *nyak* and *toubabs*!' Foreign practices, stereotypes of 'imagined others' => Diaspora, westernisation, globalisation, media influence, tourism, 'Babylon syndrome', Presidential rhetoric about nationalism
- e) Commoditisation of sexuality => the sexual body as an item of exchange

*Figure 10.1: The predominant sexual scripts available to youths in The Gambia*



### **10.2.1 The sexual script based on precedent**

For many of the youths and adults observed in the study, meaningful sexuality revolved around the social cultural rite of marriage as discussed in chapter six. Emic value systems and beliefs dictated a sexual script with deep undertones of morality, virginity and abstinence until marriage, communal exchange of sexual rights and responsibilities between the familial kin groups of the marrying couple, payments of dowry or bride-price, etc. This script gives pre-eminence to the uninterrupted reign of precedence as proclaimed in gerontocratic communities; what the elders in society claim to be 'the sexual tradition as practiced by our forefathers...' is reified and reproduced as the normative practice. The roles cast for different actors in the script are very gender-segregated, with a double standard that allows the male actors certain privileges totally denied their female counterparts. This particular sexual script tended to be shaped along ethnic lines. For example it was commonly said, 'the Fulas arrange marriages for their pre-pubescent daughters,' 'the Mandinka prescribe female genital mutilation as a necessary rite for establishing feminine propriety,' 'the Jahanke young men must marry polygynously as a proof of achieving manhood.'



Contrary to the assumption that youths are always in opposition to the socially-approved proscriptions of adults and elders (see chapter three), many youths in the study subscribed to and upheld the reified version of their 'sexual tradition' – that is as presented by the notable elders who were also the gatekeepers of so-called timeless cultural norms. Consequently some sexual practices that were labelled archaic by some factions in society, such as early forced arranged marriages, payment of bride price or dowry, polygyny, betrothal of young children, relationships in which elderly men marry young virgin brides as third or fourth wives, and widow inheritance, were often not contested, especially by uneducated rural youths, more-so if they were female.

#### **10.2.2 The sexual script based on localised Islam**

As detailed in chapter seven, spirituality and religiosity make up a vital component of the identity, subculture and personal understanding of self of many youths in the study. Many participants strongly identified as practising Muslims; they often quoted from the Qur'an during interviews and discussions and performed the daily rituals and routine rites mandated by the Islamic faith. Many determined their sexuality depending on the proscriptions and prescriptions of Islam. Due to the high proportion of Muslims in the study area, this particular sexual script (or versions thereof) was widely enacted. It was popular among many participants, many of whom swore to adhere to its dictates without compromise.

Results presented the diversity of practices and interpretations of Islam as enacted in the daily lives of participants (see also appendix 13). This confirms the writings of other scholars who highlight the syncretism between aspects of Islam and African tradition in the performances and observances of contemporary Islam as practiced in several other West African societies (see for example Rosander and Westerlund 1997). Consequently the finer details of the sexual scripts based upon the Islamic ethos often differed depending on the version of Islam that individual respondents practised. For example a young man belonging to the Mouride brotherhood originating from Touba in Senegal would seek the guidance of Serigne Ahmed Mbacke, or the

deceased Toubba Mbacke about the choice of sexual partner, the exact time for sexual debut, duration of abstinence in relation to Islamic purity, or whether or not to use protection such as condoms or contraception in his sexual relationship(s). An ordinary Gambian Muslim youth would offer charity in the form of candles to light up the rural mosque, or prayer mats, or give *zakat* – alms to the poor, in exchange for requested prayers of supplication by Islamic elders and leaders so that he finds sexual favour and appeal from a particular potential sexual partner.

Though largely dependent on the written precepts of the Qur'an, research observation revealed that many participants relied on the interpretations of scriptures provided by Islamic guides called *marabouts*, or leaders of Islamic prayers called *Imams*.

### **10.2.3 The sexual script based on the 'ABC preventive strategy'**

There is a complex interlocking of nuances and local appropriations of the concepts sexuality, sexual health and reproductive health (Nyanzi 2006b)<sup>2</sup>. People often assumed that because I was studying sexuality, I must also be investigating sexual and reproductive health. They often led me into conversations about HIV/AIDS, abortion, sexually transmitted infections, fertility issues, pregnancy, and contraception. It became apparent that there was a third sexual script that amalgamates diverse aspects of contemporary public health discourse with local conceptions of sexuality. It mainly dwells on 'the safe sex message' as presented in common ABC preventive strategies.

Many youths and adults, especially those from more urban areas, the educated, those from higher social classes, and those involved in or exposed to locally available sexual and reproductive health programmes, frequently revealed their subscription to this particular sexual script based on public health discourse. The contents of this script were largely based on the messages of anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns and messages. These included slogans such as 'Better

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<sup>2</sup> Although sexuality, sexual health, and reproductive health are often used interchangeably (even in academic discussions), I stress they are distinct concepts which overlap in only some areas and differ in others. Not everything to do with sexuality is about sexual health. Furthermore, although sexual health and reproductive health intersect, there are areas of sexual health that are not about reproductive health, and vice versa (see also Miller 2000).



single and alive, than sexually active and dying from HIV/AIDS', 'True love waits', 'No, means no!' etc.

This script excluded so-called traditional modes of sexual and reproductive health such as charms to protect against sexually transmitted infections, herbs to increase sexual performance, local modes of contraception, and the denial of HIV by many traditional healers. Interestingly, this particular script illustrated the changing character of sexual scripts. According to Gagnon (1977:6), 'Scripts do change, as new elements are added and old elements are reworked, but very few people have the desire, energy, or persistence to create highly innovative or novel scripts...' It shows the local community's processes of adopting the HIV/AIDS metaphor as another platform from which to foster control of 'unsafe' sexual behaviour, and new ways of legitimating socially acceptable sexual expressions.

#### **10.2.4 The sexual script based on 'foreign' practices**

There exists a sexual script that is submerged<sup>3</sup>, but widely adhered to, particularly in urban areas in The Gambia including the Kombos where most 'aliens' (– the official local label for foreigners) reside, on the Atlantic Coast which abounds with tourists during the tourism season, and the multi-cultural capital – Banjul. When challenged about its actuality as a distinct sexual script, I returned to my data and found I could not negate its presence. This sexual script is premised upon stereotypical imaginations of the sexual lives of outsiders. It repeatedly emerges in definitions of 'what is not "Gambian"'. Analysis revealed it is a mechanism of trying to control the sexual appropriateness of 'insiders', 'us'. It illustrates the clash between cultural scenarios and interpersonal or intrapsychic sexual scripts. This sexual script features rebukes and rebuttal of individuals perceived to step out of line of acceptable sexual conduct for 'Gambians'. The argument was that while such practices were acceptable for outsiders, they were not proper for

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<sup>3</sup> Submerged in this case meaning it is prevalent but below the dominant or main sexual scripts.

Gambians. Two critical questions: 'what does "Gambian" refer to here?' and 'beyond the seasonal tourists, who are these outsiders?'

In such contexts, 'Gambian' was a homogenising term aimed at unifying the inherent diversity of individuals and sub-groups. It formed a unit of belonging. When pushed for clarity, then participants' claims crumbled. Definitions centred around culture and religion including 'Gambian nationality', 'Senegambian-ness' – based on claims of oneness, 'Muslim Gambians', 'abiding citizens', or 'African culture'. Ultimately, each of these categories is highly problematic in definition. Currently there is renewed passion and heated discussions about 'acceptable Gambian sexuality' versus 'unacceptable foreign sexual culture imported by outsiders,' in response to the president's declaration that homosexual men and women must be beheaded, imprisoned, or expelled from the country' (see figure 10.3).

*Gan*, the Wollof word for 'foreigner' is commonly translated into English as either 'stranger' or 'alien'. Hosts are legally required to ensure that all immigrants register (see figure 10.2) and pay annual dues<sup>4</sup>. *Gan* was relatively neutral, and could also refer to a stranger from another Gambian village. However a loaded term connoting difference, that was often used to refer to immigrants from Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, was *nyak*. Participants explained that these other groupings were very different in character, culture, beliefs and practices from 'the Senegambian


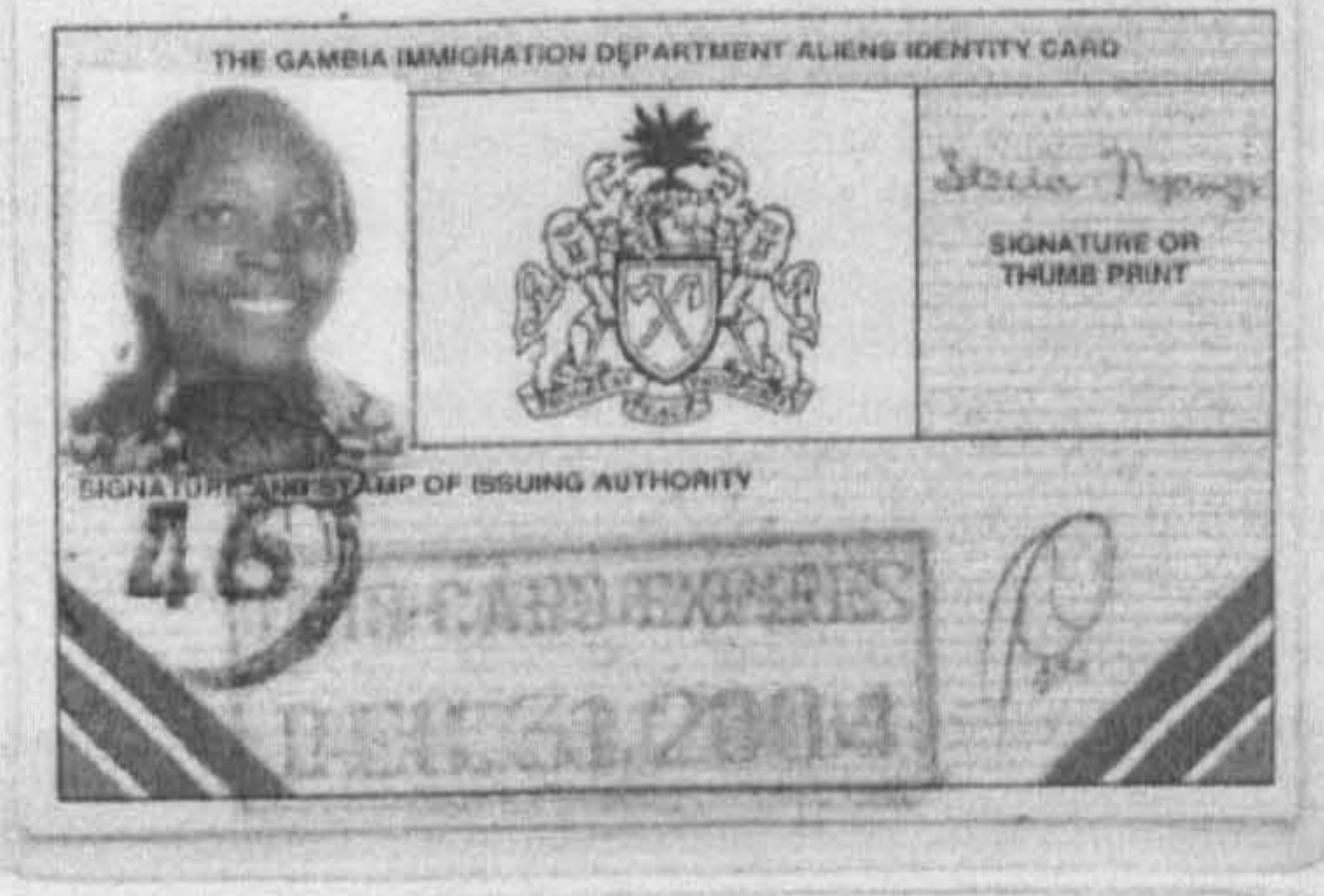
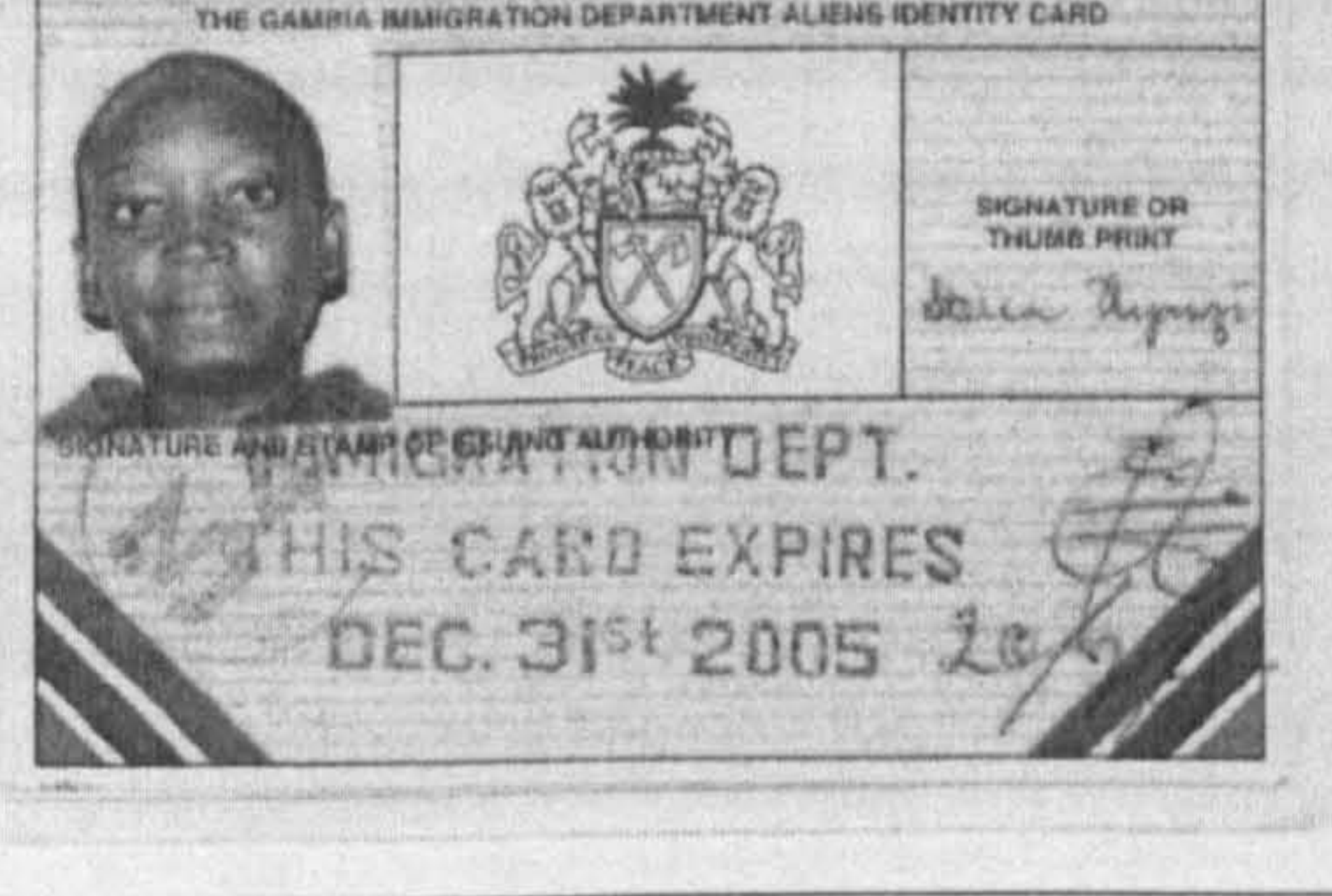
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<sup>4</sup> The Registration of Aliens (Amendment) Act, 1988 (No. 17 of 1988) amends the Gambia Registration of Aliens Act, 1977, to add the following language regarding the residence of aliens: "10A. (1) No owner of any premises or his agent shall allow any alien who is not in possession of a visiting pass issued under section 7 of the Immigration Act, or a certificate issued under section 10 (1) of this Act, to reside in such premises. (2) Every owner of any premises in which an alien resides shall, within one month of the date of commencement of such residence, unless the alien shall have already ceased to reside therein, submit details of the identity, including the national status, occupation, sex and family status, of such alien to the alkalo of the village or town in which such premises is situated, and in the City of Banjul to the local authority of the area. (3) (i) Every alkalo of a village or town shall submit through the Chief of the district, or where there is no Chief in such village or town, through the local authority of the area, and (ii) in the City of Banjul, the local authority of the area shall submit, annually, to the nearest officer, the details referred to in subsection (2) of this section, of all the aliens staying in such village, town or area, as the case may be. (4) Any person who contravenes the provisions of subsection (1) or subsection (2) of this section commits an offense and is liable to a fine of five hundred dalais or to a term of imprisonment of one month or to both such fine and imprisonment."



people'. Although African, they were portrayed as drastically different. *Gan* and *nyak* commonly referred to black outsiders, and *toubab* to white outsiders<sup>5</sup>.

Figure 10.2 Some of my annual aliens' registration cards

|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                            |  |                 |                   |                     |             |                        |                      |                              |                            |                                            |  |                                          |  |                                            |  |
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<sup>5</sup> These categories are used here to refer to skin-colour, and not race. In Nyanzi et al. 2005 we describe how I was referred to as *toubab* although I am black-skinned, illustrating the complexity of these labels.



Homosexuality was openly described as a foreign form of sexuality by participants from all sampled groups, including youths and adults, males and females, elite and illiterate, rural and urban, employed and unemployed (see also Touray 2006).

*Figure 10.3 Homosexuality belongs to foreigners<sup>6</sup>*

**Gambia: No Room for Gays**  
*The Daily Observer (Banjul)*  
 19 May 2008  
 Alhagie Jobe  
 President Alhaji Dr Yahya Jammeh, on Thursday, gave less than 24 hours (until last week Friday) ultimatum to homosexuals, drug dealers, thieves and other criminals, to leave The Gambia or face serious consequences if caught.  
 The president equally warned all those who harbour such individuals to kick them out of their compounds, noting that a mass patrol will be conducted on the instructions of the IGP and the director of the Gambia Immigration Department to weed bad elements in society. "Any hotel, lodge or motel that lodges this kind of individuals will be closed down, because this act is unlawful. We are in a Muslim dominated country and I will not and shall never accept such individuals in this country". He stated that a law is in place regarding this unlawful acts tougher than the Iranian laws and warned those involve in this infamous activities to desist from them. He maintained that foreigners are highly welcome into The Gambia, but not bad elements.  
 The Gambian leader made this remarks on Thursday at the Buffer Zone ground in Tallinding, while addressing thousands of supporters at a victory celebration rally, as part of the 'Dialogue with the People Tour'. Opportunities for youths engaging skilled jobs top the agenda of the meeting...

The narratives of *bumsters* revealed that their practice of sex tourism is locally labelled 'definitely foreign'. Key informants who were outsiders to the *bumsing* youth sub-culture provided several

<sup>6</sup> Another media source reported: 'Jammeh is reported to have given gays and lesbians 24 hours to leave the country while speaking in the town of Tallinding on May 15, 2008, during a presidential "Dialogue with the People" tour. According to the Gambian newspaper, *The Daily Observer*, Jammeh was quoted as saying, "We are in a Muslim dominated country and I will not and shall never accept such individuals [homosexuals] in this country." During the speech he also vowed to "cut off the head" of any homosexual caught. The government has since denied that Jammeh called for decapitating homosexuals, without addressing his other reported threats. ... Other prominent Gambians have echoed Jammeh's statements. On May 29, Alhaji Banding Drammeh, president of the Islamic Council of Gambia, told the Associated Press news service: "We thank President Jammeh for leading the battle against homosexuality in Africa. Our culture and religion are totally incompatible with this phenomenon."

Activists in the region told Human Rights Watch that following these statements at least three Gambian men were detained because police suspected them of homosexual conduct. The Associated Press also reported the arrest on June 2 of two Spanish men for allegedly "making homosexual proposals" to a taxi driver. Article 144 of Gambia's 1965 Criminal Code criminalizes homosexual conduct as an "unnatural offence" and provides for a prison sentence of up to 14 years. This is contrary to Gambia's international human rights commitments. Gambia ratified the African Charter on Human and People's Rights in June 1999. It acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1979. Both protect the right to equality and non-discrimination.'



labels denoting distance, disassociation and exclusion when describing to me what they thought about the *bumsters*' sexual conduct. Two typical quotes that summarise the tendency to designate this practice as largely western, foreign, and tourist-driven include: '*Ki bumster defa Toubab la!*' - meaning: These *bumsters* are White-men!' and '*Ki gor defa halat ak dundi kom toubab!*' - meaning: These young men think and behave like they are foreigners!

In Nyanzi, Bah and Joof (2007), we discuss the different attitudes of elderly Islamic leaders and guides, as well as traditional healers (*Marabouts*), towards the sexual behaviour of the younger generation. They used terms such as foreign, imported, copied, fake, atypical, etc. when discussing the sexual conduct of youths including *bumsters*, the social elite, the more educated, those who have travelled overseas, and those who are involved in public health reproductive health programmes, particularly the ones promoting condom-use, modern contraception, and discouraging traditional methods of healing. These local elders frequently blamed the above sub-groups of youths for the influx of new and deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS, high blood pressure, and cancers.

Adults and youths frequently categorised as foreign the growing argument for the need to give space to love, romance, personal emotion and sexual attraction prior to sexual commitment. Several study participants lamented the mostly youthful insistence on the significant role of romantic involvement and long periods of courtship that often involved varying degrees of sexual activity, and the need for sexual, emotional and companionable compatibility before sealing a permanent partnership. Many youths in the study, particularly those in urban spaces, vigorously argued for the need to develop their ability to 'romance a potential sexual partner' behind the back of their relevant adult(s). 'Personal choice' rated above arranged marriage.

Those who were not in favour of this position mainly stressed that it was a largely foreign concept for processing sexual partnerships because it tended to give the individual sexual partners autonomy and power over the family and wider kin group in initiating, negotiating, controlling and deciding about the sexualities of their younger members. Even some of the youths, whose

personal accounts showed that this was their main reason and mode of initiating and building sexual relationship, revealed that they believed that romantic notions of love were not necessarily local. Nonetheless they reasoned that even though they were probably adopting foreign western aspects of sexuality, they also drove home the fact that ‘not everything local is good and not everything foreign is detrimental to us!’

The concept of monogamy as a basis for sexual relations was also variously discussed as belonging to a Eurocentric sexual script. Several study participants strongly believed in the rooted-ness of polygyny for males and serial monogamy<sup>7</sup> for females, within the ‘proper African way of life’. They argued that multiple partnerships were consistent with the sexual culture of their predecessors as well as the normative practice of Islam. Therefore the concept of a restrictive monogamy endorsed by the ‘be faithful to one sexual partner unless in the case of death of either partner’ – whether practised as a result of public health preventive strategy, a religious code of practice, or a binding legal pronouncement – was often discussed as being intrinsically moralistic, western, neo-Judeo-Christian and largely inappropriate to locally meaningful sexualities. ‘These *Toubabs* should not impose their foreign sexual mores on our young people who are not yet married, simply because they want to stop the spread of some disease in countries far away from us. If you look around at the countries with high HIV/AIDS levels in Africa, you will find that they are very westernised – copying everything from Europe and America and yet also demonising everything that is African.’ These words of one polygynous key informant involved in designing and reformulating youth policies in The Gambia, accurately capture and summarise the qualms and frequently expressed opinion of many elders in both rural and urban study sites.

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<sup>7</sup> As discussed in chapter six, there is a locally established form of serial monogamy (albeit relatively large silences abounding about it in public discourse, scholarly research, government policies or programmes of intervention within The Gambia). This common sexual practice is made possible by repeated divorce and the remarriage of women from tender young ages to when they are elderly.



#### **10.2.5 The sexual script based on commoditisation and exchange**

The two social categories that epitomised the commoditisation of sexuality were the *chagga* and the *bumster*; one mainly female, the other mostly male. As discussed in chapter five, these two categories involved explicitly utilising the sexual body as an item on offer in exchange for cash, treats, gifts, foreign travel, and wealth. Interestingly, the transactional element was not unique to these commercialised sexual categories, but also permeated through other less ostracised forms of sexual relationships.

Exchange was an integral part of the diverse sexualisation processes of youths in the study. In socially approved contexts of sexual activity, such as marriage, exchange took the form of bride price. Bride price often involved money, material gifts such as clothes, electrical appliances, beds, decorated metal pots and pans, livestock, and the all important social gift of kola nuts to be shared among all adults present at the ceremony and festivities. In some rare cases, the wealthy family of a bride gave dowry contributions towards the marriage ceremony.

In premarital sexual relationships boys were expected to regularly give gifts to their girlfriends as an indication of continued sexual interest. Platonic relationships often turned sexual when the boy started giving monetary gifts to the girl. If girls wanted to maintain platonic friendships with boys, they declined gifts of cash.

In marriage, the husband provided for the physical, material, financial and other needs of his wife (or wives). They in turn met his domestic, sexual and reproductive needs including bearing and raising his children. These gender roles based on exchange were deeply entrenched in everyday life.

#### ***10.3 Meaning and individuals' negotiation of sexual scripts***

Examination of the sexual scripts evident among most of the rural youth sub-cultures highlights that these villages were paradigmatic defined in a double sense of having '...a very high degree of shared meanings and... specific or concrete meanings perceived as consistently derived from a

small number of highly integrated “master” meanings. Thus, specific shared meanings are experienced as being consistent both within and across distinct spheres of life’ (Simon and Gagnon 1985:102). Among the rural-based youths, the traditional and Islamic sexual scripts were dominant and widespread.

However, among other Gambian youth subcultures, there was evidence of shifting into post-paradigmatic societies/ settings, which are defined as:

‘...those where there is substantially less by way of shared meanings and, possibly of greater significance, where there are potentially profound disjunctures of meanings between distinct spheres of life. And, as a result, the enactment of the same role within different spheres of life or different roles within the same spheres routinely require different appearances, if not different organisations, of the self. ...those where the instructive implications of the cultural scenarios specific to given institutional spheres have little by way of continuities of content of continuities of style’ (Simon and Gagnon 1985:102-103).

This was clear specifically among youths whose sexual experiences involved non-Gambians, foreigners, tourists, or Gambians in diaspora and returnees. They often had to negotiate and realign their own sexuality, desires and experiences in relation to and/ or in consultation with their sexual partner(s)’ own alternative scripts. For example among *bumsters*, having sexual relationships with *toubabs*, there was often reversal of gender roles, redefinition of gender power dynamics particularly when the woman was older or wealthier. The meaning of this sexual relationship is different to that which they have with local girls. Because *bumster-toubab* relationships aim at immigration, Gambian youths often yielded to the desires and fantasies of their partner. It was part of their strategy. However these same boys unyieldingly dictated the terms in their sexual relationships with local girls.

The shift to post-paradigmatic setting was also apparent among ‘modern’ upbeat youths who aspired towards western lifestyles which contradicted local cultural or religious values. Often



located in the urban areas, such young people frequently expressed sexual incompatibility with provincial dwellers that were believed to adhere to tradition. Furthermore, different western influences resulted into heterogeneous 'modern' sexual scripts.

Another context with compounded alternative meanings of the sexual was among HIV-infected youths whose partner desired parenthood. There were competing meanings of the sexual act which often necessitated high-skilled negotiation, and could potentially result into violence if the partner was not persuaded about adopting the 'safe sex' script.

### **10.3.1 The role of youth sub-culture in shaping personal sexual scripts**

The youths in this study subscribed to a wide range of youth subcultures, many of them combining aspects chosen from either one or a combination of several factions of youth behaviour. Of particular significance is syncretism of diverse distinct subcultures ranging from the local to the global. For example chapter 7 illustrates combining ethnic, Islamic, westernised, and Rastafarian youth subcultures.

Analysis of ethnographic data about the youth sexualities reveals important influences of specific individuals' cliques of belonging. The spaces of association, clubs of membership, groups where like-minded youths hung out, or local places where young people chill out, have a significant impact on their constructions, understandings, appreciations and appropriations of specific sexual conduct. This is the evidence of the power of peer pressure in constructing what is or is not meaningful sexuality to individuals as well as sub-groups of youths. The predominant youth subculture to which an individual subscribes, lays a foundation for that individual's ability to understand, affirm, emphasise, and adhere to the subcomponents<sup>8</sup> of different sexual scripts. It

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<sup>8</sup> Such subcomponents could include answers to the 5Ws: who, what, where, why, when, and how. At another level, one could consider how a change in one answer, subsequently affects answers to the other questions. For example: I mapped the possible trajectories of typical youths from five subcultures namely student, *bumster*, *Ibadu*, provincial girl, young co-wife.

also affects whether or not that individual contests, challenges, resists or alters aspects of the sexual practices and mores prescribed or proscribed by each available sexual script.

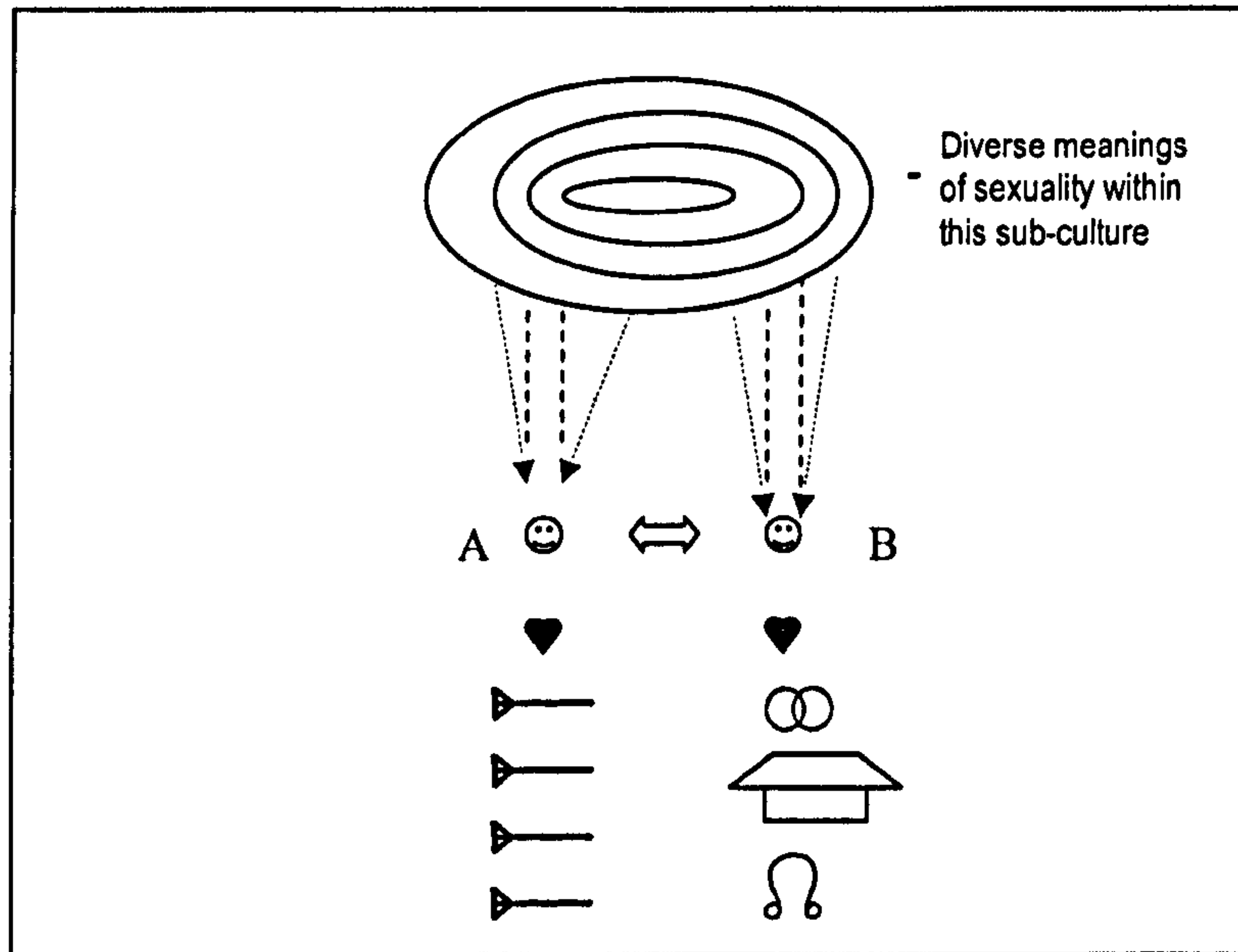
What individual youths consider relevant and appropriate to their present circumstances plays a vital role in their choices about the contents of the sexual script(s) they perform in their day-to-day lives. While this may seem very obvious<sup>9</sup>, the history of interventions into sexual behaviour reveals the opposite: people who design sexual behaviour change programmes often do not realise that individuals who participate in seemingly 'high risk sexual activities' (such as unprotected sex with strangers, or with partners known to be HIV-infected, or having casual sex with different partners, sporadic condom use) attach specific meanings relevant to their subculture to these activities. For example if condom-less sex means higher pay, then for one who sees sex as a source of income, and needs to make quick profits, safe-sex may be interpreted as bad business practice. Likewise where sex is a route to begetting many children in a bid to out-do older senior wives in a polygynous compound, a teenage co-wife may interpret condom-use as a wrong competition strategy. And yet for a studious girl set on graduating and living long to impact society, condoms make perfect sense if she is sexually active, but they may not even be an option if she chooses to abstain until graduation day.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, if everyone around me is denying that HIV/AIDS is real, and I have never really seen anybody in my immediate surroundings that said they have HIV or AIDS, why would I use condoms, or abstain from sex, or even feel at risk? Why would I take up interventions that have worked in Uganda and other high-HIV-risk countries? It means nothing to me. Judging from how much money is spent on publicising safe sex as a means to reducing HIV in The Gambia, and targeting youths who do not see or feel the urgency, I do not think it is so obvious. The sexual health interventions are not tapping into the meanings that youths bring to issues of sexuality. If they did, they would have a different content, different justification, different approach, and they would appreciate the emic sense which is so obvious [and yet NOT obvious].



*Figure 10.4 Sexual interaction holds different meanings*



The diversity of meanings of sexuality that are shared within particular subcultures, influence the meanings that individual members bring to and make out of their sexual interactions. For example when A meets B above, and they become sexually involved with each other, the encounter means different things to each of them. A 'loves' (red) B and is planning to have lots of sex. B also 'loves' (blue) A and is thinking about the two of them becoming one in marriage, settling down together to build their home, and having reproductive sex of at least two children. Both interpretations are based on local sexual scripts. Each interpretation gets its legitimacy from specific subcultures. The values that the individuals, and the wider society bring to these two interpretations, are distinctively shaped by the subculture(s) from which they draw meanings.

This finding is consistent with the basic principle of sexual scripts drawing their meaning from three constantly negotiated levels of organisation: cultural, interpersonal and intrapsychic (Gagnon and Lewis 1973). While I do not delve into the intra-psychic level which 'deals with the internal... the motivational elements that produce arousal or at least a commitment to the activity' (1973:20), this thesis has explored the external sexual cultures, and the interpersonal levels.

Membership to one or more youth subcultures illustrates the inter-connectedness between the collective, interpersonal and intra-personal levels of sexual scripting. It provides an analytical space for examining the selection processes and consequent choices made by individual youths, in interaction with their youth subculture(s) which shape their identities and sexualities.

In analysis, membership to a subculture enables the researcher to examine specific narratives of identifying with a particular subculture, in relation to commonalities within sexual stories, experiences and encounters; aimed at identifying associated sexual scripts. After tracing and locating the sexual scripts, the framework facilitates the researcher to explore how they are shaped by the dominant subcultures of affiliation available to study participants. It is possible to work out how the meaning derived from belonging to a particular youth subculture shapes choices about meaningful sexual practice. For example the overarching goal of emigration from The Gambia at whatever cost is integral to the *bumster* subculture. This explains why one would have sexual liaisons with foreigners especially if they are on short-stay visits, why one would fabricate or otherwise exaggerate stories about being disadvantaged, or embrace the social stigma of transgressing sexual boundaries including race, ethnicity, and age.

The above point illustrates the prescriptive character of sexual scripts. However innovations are also possible because of the agency of individuals as co-authors of their personal sexual scripts (see chapter two). Thus sexual scripts are not fixed, but flexible enough to allow negotiation of the contents therein. This explains contradictions between cultural scenarios, and actual interpersonal sexual scripts. It explains inconsistencies between expected and actual sexual behaviour because of affiliation to a particular youth subculture. For example if the subculture of belonging for a study participant is 'rural practising Muslim', one would expect sexual practice characterised by abstinence until marriage, rejection of using condoms, denouncement of modern contraception for females, acceptance of arranged early marriage, allocating to parents or adult family and wider kin group members the upper hand in initiating and arranging of sexual relationships based on marriage, others choosing the sexual partner instead of the individuals



chosen, bargaining of bride price or dowry, and the importance of blessing of the sexual partners in a formal ceremony of marriage held at a mosque. However it was not uncommon for the sexual narratives of Islamic rural youths – both male and female – to report consistent use of condoms, or the adoption of the pill to help in the spacing of their children, individual selection of sexual partners depending on romantic notions of love, or even multiple premarital sexual partners. In this particular case, even though preliminary analysis suggested that the main sexual scripts adhered to by members of this youth subculture would be the traditional and Islamic ones, long observation and in-depth analysis of the data confirmed the persistent syncretism which combined aspects of the public health sexual script. This finding was in spite of the established intensive tension, contradictions, and oppositions between the former and latter sexual scripts.

Another typical example was found among *bumsters*, who combined traditional, public health, Islamic, and xenophobic sexual scripts. It was not uncommon to find, say, a Mustafarian (practising Muslim with dreadlocks), who also visited a traditional healer to obtain *jujus* to help him win the sexual favours and approval of an older rich American woman. He might also report relatively consistent condom-use in sexual interaction with this older *toubab*, even though simultaneously reporting total refusal to use condoms with his Gambian wife (or wives). A few *bumsters* in the study revealed that although they were really heterosexual, they were not averse to homosexual activities if they promised to be lucrative enough. In this latter example, there was a combination of traditional, Islamic, public health, xenophobic and commoditisation sexual scripts.

This highlights the agency of individuals to choose which combinations of sexual script to adhere to. Similar to the locks on a gate, or the operating valves of a dam, the individual's choices determine the inclusion and exclusion criteria into personal sexual scripts. In other words, each individual youth plays a significant role in determining their sexuality (or aspects thereof) by consciously or unconsciously choosing which elements of the available sexual script to enact in

their performance of sexuality. The choices are based on the meanings that the individual attaches to them. Rather than being passive recipients of social dictates, the majority of youths exercised a high level of agency in determining their own sexuality.

From the available sexual scripts, youths chose particular plots to enact at certain moments in their life. These choices were never fixed, but changed with different settings, the passage of time, or exposure to alternative constructions of the sexual terrain. Several factors colluded to determine specific elements of a particular sexual script enacted by individual youths. Such factors included location, education, religion, gender, social class, income levels, government policy, available programmes, exposure either through travel, popular culture, and the media.

### **10.3.2 Gender and sexual scripts**

In agreement with Wiederman's (2005) conclusions, this thesis reiterates that rather than being uniform or neutral in their prescriptions and proscriptions for either male or female community members, sexual scripts are highly gendered. As highlighted in the results, patriarchy, gender socialisation, and gender inequities disadvantage female youths relative to their male counterparts. The few individuals who went against the tide, often did so at a cost. For example female youths in the study whose sexuality was deemed 'foreign' often delayed their sexual debut, did not marry until they were much older than the age at which their age-group normally married, were blamed by others for hiding behind claims of career advancement, or otherwise of maintaining a string of partners when they started sexual activity. There was a general impression that for females, feminine respectability dictated sexual commitment to a socially approved partner in the shape of marriage and later sealed by the birth of (preferably many) male progeny. Therefore a single female of marriageable age was written-off as lewd, improper, unserious, probably polluted, frigid, perhaps suffering from sexual illnesses, cursed with infertility. Otherwise the only socially accepted excuse for singleness of females of reproductive age was if



they were known to be foreign, or especially those from a westernised background, or following a westernised mode of conduct such as attending the higher levels of the ‘*Toubab* education system’ including A-level secondary schools, tertiary institutions, or university. And yet on the other hand, it was widely acceptable for male youths to postpone marriage in lieu of career advancement.

#### ***10.4 Summary of the sexual scripts***

1. Rather than having one general sexual script whose contents individual youths in a society negotiate depending on their specific circumstances, there are a variety of sexual scripts within each local context. Some of these scripts have existed for a long time, others are new or emerging, with contents, storylines, actors, and plots developing in response to particular circumstances.

2. None of these sexual scripts are closed. The extent of their bounded-ness depends on many factors including

- a) the length of time they have been established,
- b) their coverage (how many people know about them and ascribe to them),
- c) whether or not they are codified as texts (such as the *hadith*, or the *kama sutra*), or in the looser daily rituals of a society,
- d) the tenacity with which the custodians of the script watch over its performance,
- e) the extent of rewards for adhering to the script as well as the punishments for digressing aspects therein,
- f) its appropriateness to and applicability in diverse situations, and
- g) the power behind its scribes.

For example is it a WHO-driven campaign to discourage female genital mutilation, or a PEPFAR-funded drive to distribute condoms to all sexually active adolescents, or a local custom

of betrothal implied by exchange of kola nuts between two consenting adults on behalf of their infant progeny? All these factors interact in determining the extent to which composite segments of a script can be altered, contested, thrown out, improved or combined with alternative ones.

3. As illustrated in figure 10.5, while there are some similarities between different sexual scripts, there are also differences and tensions between others. Some scripts such as the one based on tradition and Islam, have several similarities. Others are more dissimilar and thus relatively less compatible such as the public health and traditional sexual scripts.

*Figure 10.5 Comparing sexual scripts*

| <i>Components of a script</i>            | <i>Precedent</i> | <i>commod<br/>-itisation</i> | <i>Islam</i> | <i>Public<br/>Health</i> | <i>Alienating</i> |
|------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Early marriage for girls                 | √                | √ X                          | √            | X                        | X                 |
| Virginity for girls until marriage       | √                | √                            | √            | √                        | X                 |
| Early sexual debut for boys              | √                | X                            | √            | X                        | √                 |
| Early pregnancy                          | √                | X                            | √            | X                        | √                 |
| Abortion                                 | X                | √                            | X            | √                        | √X                |
| Many children                            | √                | X√                           | √            | X                        | X                 |
| Bride price, dowry, transactional sex    | √                | √                            | √            | X                        | X                 |
| Child spacing by traditional methods     | √                | ?                            | √            | X                        | X                 |
| Double standards: restrictive femininity | √                | √                            | √            | X                        | X                 |
| Female genital mutilation                | √                | ?                            | X            | X                        | X                 |
| Male circumcision                        | √                | ?                            | √            | √                        | √X                |
| Polygyny: multiple partners for males    | √                | √                            | √            | X                        | X√                |
| Patriarchal system                       | √                | √                            | √            | X                        | X                 |
| Hetero-normativity                       | √                | √ X                          | √            | √                        | √X                |



|                                                                   |    |    |    |    |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Homosexuality is penalised                                        | √  | X  | √  | √  | X  |
| Divorce is discouraged                                            | √  | X  | X  | ?  | X  |
| Kin group priorities over individual                              | √  | X  | √  | X  | X  |
| Individual agency                                                 | X  | √  | X  | √  | √  |
| Natural contraception: rhythm, breast feeding, coitus interruptus | √  | √  | √  | √  | √  |
| Modern contraception: the pill, IUD, injectables, etc             | X  | √  | X  | √  | √  |
| Anal sex                                                          | X  | √  | X  | X  | √X |
| Condom use                                                        | X  | √X | X  | √  | √  |
| Non-penetrative sex                                               | X  | √X | ?  | √  | √  |
| Chastity                                                          | X√ | X  | X√ | √  | X  |
| Age asymmetrical relationships                                    | √  | √  | √  | X  | √  |
| Neo-colonial                                                      | X  | X  | X  | √  | √  |
| HIV/AIDS is a reality                                             | X√ | √X | X√ | √  | √  |
| Self determination                                                | X  | √X | X  | √X | √  |
| Mediation of sexual relationships                                 | √  | √X | √  | X  | √  |

The √ represents a level of acceptability of the specific component within the script. Because I do not want to over-simplify complex dynamics of these sexual scripts, I use the symbol √ to indicate a range of possibilities running from a) it is not forbidden, b) it is condoned c) it is approved; it is happening within this sexual script. The X represents the opposite: that the component under consideration is not characteristic of the script in question. Where I have used both, √X, it means that there is a mixed perception of the component. It may also indicate that while some people do it, others do not. It shows shifts depending on context. And I have used the

symbol ? because there is no definite answer. Unlike the previous scenario with  $\sqrt{X}$ , this means that it really depends on what the subculture is, because different subcultures subscribe to different ideals.

4. Each of the five scripts above contains scripts within scripts.

5. Individual youths, diverse social groups and other members of each community are conversant with the basic principles, the prescriptions, and proscriptions of each sexual script. These are often handed down through diverse processes of socialisation (including observation, initiation rites, and instruction) as practised in each locale. Newer, emergent sexual scripts, such as the common ABC script, are handed down through the media, bill boards, drama, lectures, tours, information materials, etc. Through observation of one's performed sexuality, other members of the society who are knowledgeable about the available sexual scripts can identify and place the script, or combination of scripts an individual is enacting at any given time. Thus society can comment about, criticise, applaud or condemn what individuals or groups of youths enact.



## **Chapter 11: Conclusions**

*Tom got up from the desk and began to walk about the room.*

*'The worst of it is that I think I've lost my faith,' he said.*

*'I didn't think you had any faith, at least not the kind one loses, so I shouldn't worry if I were you.'*

*'I mean my faith in anthropology,' he said rather impatiently.*

*'Oh, that... but what is faith in anthropology – I didn't know it was the kind of thing people had.'*

*'Well, perhaps not quite in the usual sense. But I just wonder sometimes what's the use of it all. Who will benefit from my work, what exactly is the point of my researches? Are my people out there going to be any happier because I happen to have found out that they have a double descent system? Who will be any better for my having discovered new facts about the importance of the mother's brother?' Pym (1955:105)*

In this chapter I examine the extent to which I achieved the stated objectives of the study, make some conclusions about youth sexualities in The Gambia, and consider implications of the study for policy, programmes and practice.

### **11.1 Understanding the sexual lives of youths in The Gambia**

This study sought to ethnographically explore the sexual lives of youths in The Gambia, in order to generate grounded theory about meaningful youthful sexualities. Rather than impose etic formulations onto the research design, I allowed findings in the field to determine the unfolding of the research (see appendix 12 for my inductive ethnographic cycle). Would I do things the same way round if another opportunity arose? Definitely; because fundamentally, this was a pedagogical exercise <sup>primarily</sup> aimed at self-development to expand my critical thinking, skill

acquisition in designing and implementing ethnographic fieldwork, data analysis, writing up an ethnography, and defending it. And because I experienced the process, I learnt for myself what to do and what not to do. However in terms of the specified objectives (see chapter 1), there were some limitations in my methodology<sup>1</sup> including my reliance on local interlocutors for nuanced translations of complex processes or phenomenon, grounded theory approach fostered accumulation of a large volume of data with complexly inter-related themes that required protracted analysis skills, lack of a rigid research portfolio necessitated justifying to diverse audiences, clashes between biomedical ethical standards and ethics of participant observation. Furthermore, the small sample-size and numbers involved limit the generalisability of the findings. Nonetheless, this study provides rich qualitative data that explain the sexualities of the youths whom I studied. It addresses the gaping gap in in-depth studies of the sexualities of Gambian youths.

Contrary to Caldwellian thinking about 'an African sexuality', my study strongly reiterates that sexualities in a given space (say, Africa, a nation, or among a particular sub-population) cannot be homogenised into a static and uniform lump (see also Lauer 2007). Joining other critiques<sup>2</sup> of this approach to sexualities of peoples in Africa, I emphasise the need to adopt a continuum of sexualities<sup>3</sup> to replace the concept of a fixed sexuality that is inherently African (Ahlberg 1994). While I plot specific expressions of sexualities in figure 11.1, the intention is not to highlight progression from one to the other, or fixed order, or even contextual prioritisation. I am not suggesting that for example masturbation and monogamous heterosexuality are closer to asexuality than, say, mechanised sex, or that polygamous homosexuality is closer to mechanised sex. The position of each sexuality is contextual, and can differ among individuals; it is random, sporadic and constantly in flux. Rather, I am drawing a map of the range of sexual forms

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix 10 discusses practical limitations of the study.

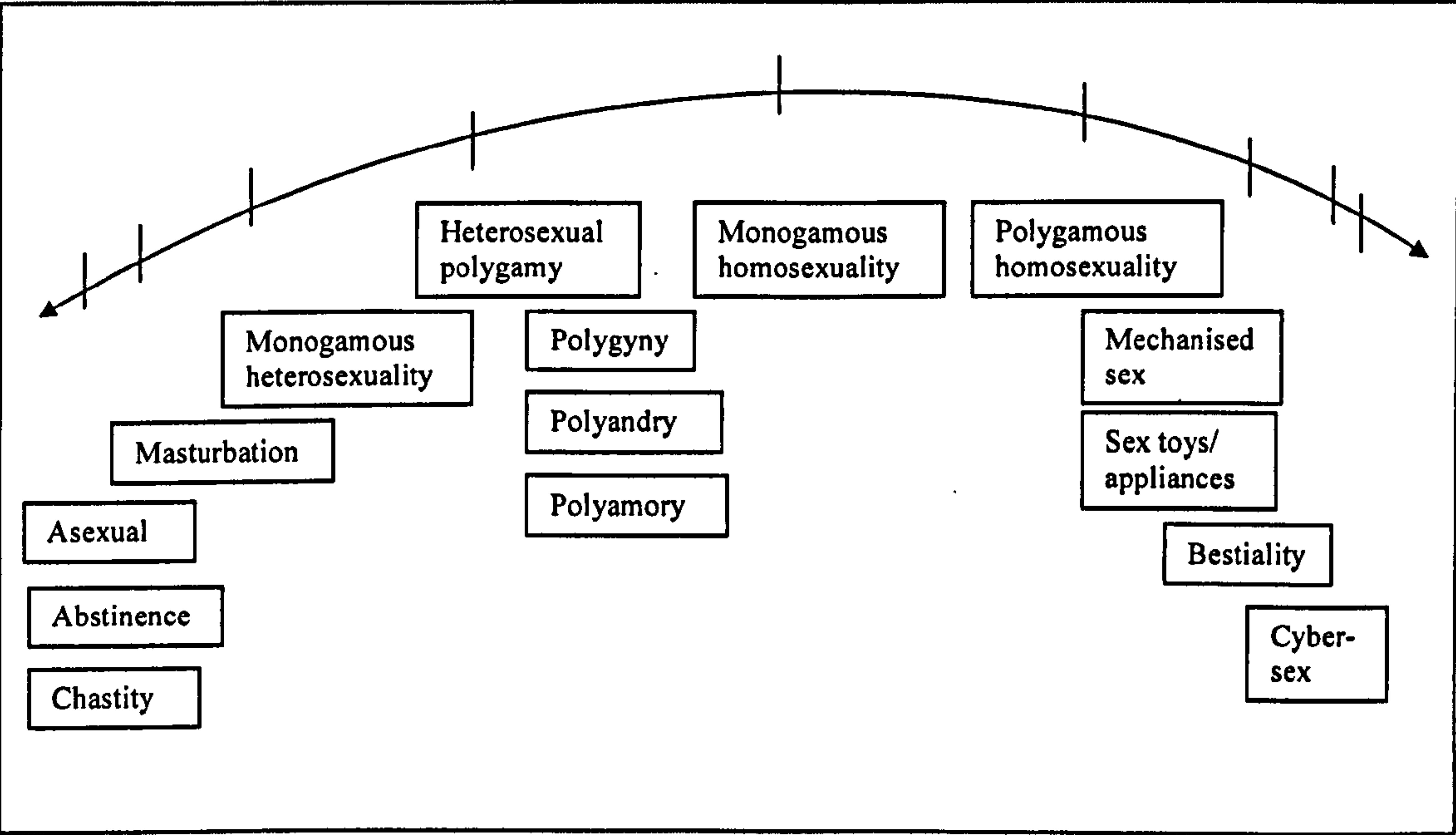
<sup>2</sup> See for example Arnfred's (2004) edited volume for diverse examples of differences in sexual practices within Africa.

<sup>3</sup> I elaborate on this in Nyanzi (2006a).



mentioned within the entire data set. It is an attempt to visually capture the fluidity of sexualities even within one social context. In fact the issue is more complex because it is about fluidity – with one expression of sexuality flowing over into the other. For example abstinence could easily go together with fantasies of mechanised sex and a bit of masturbation now and again. Similarly masturbation, whether solo or mutual, can be integrated into any of the other sexual expressions.

Figure 11.1 Continuum of sexualities – adopted from Nyanzi 2006a:11



As highlighted in the results, even within one seemingly uniform locus assumed to be occupied by study participants who share nationality, age-group, cultural background, Islamic faith, etc, the data clearly indicate diversities and contradictions in their interpretations, appropriations, appreciations, and meaning-making relating to sexuality. One group of people, from one space, at one time, and observed using the same systematic research methods yielded divergent and sometimes contradictory understandings of their sexualities. Even among the purposively selected members of a single focus group discussion, the meanings and appreciations

of sexuality varied. Generally youths in Gambia experience similar challenges to youths in other African countries, as indicated by similarities with findings in the literature. However there are also peculiarities arising from specific social, political, economic, historic, religious and other factors.

Long-term ethnographic participant observation and different triangulated qualitative research methods consistently revealed variations within some individuals. The same person would give different perspectives on the same issue, especially when asked at different times. Similarly the same person sometimes gave divergent (or even contradictory) answers to the same question when discussed in differing contexts. In addition, changing a research-assistant sometimes produced dissimilar reports from a particular respondent<sup>4</sup>. Local meanings of sexuality changed over time, place, context, mood, exposure, group of interaction, and function<sup>5</sup> of attaching meaning. This confirms the notion of fluidity of sexualities mentioned above.

It is crucial for sexuality scholars to use more versatile and dynamic conceptualisations and labels when studying sexuality. After all, human sexuality is a site rife with contestation, politics, enactments of control and power, and given to change over time (Richardson 2000, Bhattacharya 2002, Foucault 1978, Weeks 1985). Rather than conceptualising sexuality as merely situated within the body and in bodily functions, it is critical to consider the range of meanings that individuals and groups attach to it, to explore its unruly, intractable, and irrational qualities manifest in emotional investment (see also Jackson and Scott 1997). This embraces notions of desire, the erotic, emotions, sensuality, fantasy, intimacy, commitment, power, relationship, negotiation, exploration, exploitation, expression, trust, personhood, belonging, identity, pleasure, entertainment, consumption, resistance, abuse, masculine entitlement, feminine propriety, spirituality, custom, ritual, etc. It also includes issues of gender, race, class, citizenship,

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<sup>4</sup> This observation is consistent with my earlier observation of exploring emic interpretations of concepts associated with sexuality and sexual behaviour in south western Uganda; such as the lay meanings of 'love' among school-going adolescents (Nyanzi et al. 2001), the meanings of marriage among male taxi drivers (Nyanzi et al. 2004), local inclusions and exclusions of ritual sex (Nyanzi, Nassimbwa, et al. *forthcoming*).

<sup>5</sup> Why one was spelling out the reason for (or justifying) their sexuality, e.g. marriage, work, peer pressure.



community, religion, etc. The point is that sexuality is complex (Vance 1992). And as a result interventions targeting sexuality must embrace its inherent ambivalence and depth in order to be effective.

For investigating fluid unbounded concepts with shifting meanings, the qualitative paradigm is more appropriate. It facilitates meaningful explorations of inherent, embedded, or wider contextual meanings. I chose ethnographic participant observation in combination with other qualitative techniques for a variety of reasons, the most important being the potential to unravel the depths of youth sexualities. Given the complexity of meanings embedded within sexuality, ethnography was vital to unpacking the multiple layers of interpretations. The depth of lay theories uncovered in the analysis of results in this study highlight the power of ethnography as a tool for studying sexualities in context. Ethnographic participant observation among these Gambian youths revealed the range of meanings in youth sexualities. Heterosexuality was explored and found to be heterogeneous. This highlights the need for more ethnographies of sexualities in Africa, if that which is taken for granted within the sexual cultures of diverse sub-population groups is to be understood.

### ***11.2 Policy and programme implications***

*'...young people have sexual needs and rights which must be addressed regardless of whether their sexuality is seen as socially acceptable or not' (Nzioka 2001:115-6).*

*...children and youths are actors in their own lives, not merely objects of development or victims of history. All young people exercise some control over their own situations, and this should be recognised both by policymakers and practitioners and by those studying young people's lives. Ansell (2005:6)*

Youth policies and programmes at national or international level are based on the various ways in which policy makers and practitioners understand youth realities (Bajaj 2008:308). Insights from this ethnography of youth sexualities in The Gambia raise policy and programme issues.

Ambiguity of the minimum age of consent within national legal frameworks, policy documents and societal practice facilitates child-pregnancies, teen-brides, early marriages and adolescent sexual activity. Minors engage in sexual activity, willingly or otherwise because there is no specific age at which it is illegal to consummate sexual relations with under-age individuals. Kin betroth children and arrange marriages in order to consolidate religious, social, cultural and economic connections with relevant community groups. These unions are not necessarily in favour of the youths, many of whom may be required to prematurely terminate their education, submit their preferred choice of a spouse, or even conceive outside their chosen schedule. Because of this grey area, it is often impossible if not extremely difficult to claim the rights of children/ minors to protection from sexual coercion within The Gambia. However the recent advocacy work of rights-based feminist grassroots associations such as GAMCOTRAP, BAFROW, FAWE-Gam, is making in-roads, and should thus be supported, given visibility and rolled-out. The involvement of other sectors including legal and paralegal bodies, law enforcers, healthcare providers, youth workers, school-systems, Sharia law practitioners, religious teachers, cultural leaders and the media is essential. Practicalities involve availing legal counsel and services for youths (particularly girls) whose sexual rights are violated, raising awareness and promoting discussion of sexual violence and coercion, enhancing youth friendly policies and law enforcers who are pro youth-rights. Sensitisation and mass education about the problems related to adolescent sexual activity must be reconfigured to portray the local realities of Gambian youths. Flagging pertinent issues and recasting them in a negative light is important for the practice to be problematised, questioned and alienated from current good practice – whether in the language of sexual rights, sexual health, or children's rights.



Contraception use is highly gendered, with the responsibility largely left to female youths for whom the repercussions of unplanned pregnancy (particularly outside marriage) are perceived to be more dire. However misinformation, misconceptions, doubts in efficacy and fears of side-effects are widespread, discouraging use of modern contraceptive methods. The social value of fertility as proof of femininity and marriageability, further dissuades contraceptive-use by female youths. Mainly students who stood to benefit were interested in using contraceptive. Cost, access, accurate knowledge about availability and proper use, fear of reproductive health facilities and deep moralising discourses were further hindrances for adopting modern contraceptives. Traditional contraceptive methods provided by herbalists and lay midwives proved more popular among youths who were open to preventing pregnancy. Although many youths lacked accurate information about the ovulation cycle, natural methods including rhythm and withdrawal when fertile were favoured. Condoms were mainly a male domain, and more common among urban youths – specifically those relating with students or in premarital sexual activities. Main barriers were cost, reduced pleasure, suspicions based on western conspiracies to affect sexual performance, and fears of being perceived as promiscuous. Relevant interventions include reformulating available sexual education to specifically address gaps in knowledge about contraceptive use, whether modern or traditional, counteracting erroneous knowledge, eroticising condoms, delinking modern contraceptives from infertility, availing female-controlled methods of protection, and expanding the acceptability of use to cover even unmarried individuals who have the need for these items. Challenging gender differentiation of sexual protection is important to address stereotypes of feminine or masculine propriety. Outlets and providers must be more youth-friendly, less judgemental about non-marital sexual activity, and preferably non-specific so that motive for visiting them is inconspicuous.

Denial of HIV/AIDS as a Gambian reality must be tackled more vigorously using the multi-sectoral approach adopted in policy rhetoric. PLWHA as individuals and their few existent associations must be given wider visibility, in order to give the epidemic a Gambian face.

Establishment of rural-based PLWHA associations would facilitate greater community integration of HIV-infected individuals, and also localise the epidemic beyond the urban Kombos. It is important to increase youths' access to counselling and testing. This will provide information, lead to evaluation of personal risk of catching STIs and HIV/AIDS. The current national official discourse about HIV and AIDS which is backed by the continuing presidential sham of a cure is confusing to youths in The Gambia, as well the general public. Local health practitioners support the president's HIV/AIDS cure, perhaps out of fear of political reprisal. This is causing major setbacks in the advances of existing health education efforts targeting prevention, care and treatment. Believing that HIV and AIDS are curable may encourage youths to engage in risky sexual activity. HIV-infected individuals may resume having unprotected sex with new partners, because they believe they are cured. It is politically risky to counteract the prevailing melodrama by preaching the incurability of HIV/AIDS and the importance of ART in The Gambia. Civil associations, scientific researchers and international health organisations must tactfully debunk this misinformation.

Given the complexity and diversity of everyday life for youths in The Gambia, it is important that sexuality education is diversified in content, channel of presentation, language, target audience, and system of delivery. Because youths are heterogeneous, and their sexualities are varied, homogenous one-track sex education focussing on sexual and reproductive health is neither sufficient nor appropriate to the range of individuals and sub-cultures represented. Content of the FLE must be broadened and transformed from classroom textbook-type lingua to local youth colloquialisms. Sexuality education must transcend the boundaries of the formal education system, and be strategically extended into *Madarassa* education, out-of-school youths, and also working youths. Media outreach which is popular among urban-based youths, must be extended to rural youths, perhaps through community edutainment and out-reach programmes, peer-led sex education, or other targeted IEC for hard-to-reach youths. Successful community-based education programmes such as the Stepping Stones, must be rolled-out to other local



communities. Local influential leaders such as *Imams*, women-leaders, politicians, public servants, Alkalos, etc must be strategically incorporated as instruments of sex education because they are respected and listened to.

Policies and programmes for reproductive health must be more youth-friendly. Access to information, services, providers, etc must be widened in scope to cater to individuals regardless of age, marital status, or sexuality. It is important to de-stigmatise non-marital sexuality. While abstinence is ideal prior to adulthood, the protracted length of youth increasingly necessitates prolonged premarital sexual activity. The attitudes and practices of health facility providers must be targeted so that they become less judgemental of sexually active unmarried youths – a barrier that leads to avoidance of purchasing protection, forces pregnant youths to shun antenatal care, or even choose home-delivery often attended by untrained lay midwives, conceal sexually transmitted infections leading to delayed treatment, etc. Involvement of youth-providers alongside adults is a potential peer-driven intervention for delivering youth-friendly reproductive health services.

In The Gambia, sexuality is mainly subsumed under reproductive health. Thus policy and program provisioning for the sexual terrain is relegated to a reproductive health paradigm. It is important to conceptually and pragmatically differentiate the two in academia and practice respectively. Sexuality is about much more than health; definitely more broad than reproductive health. The sexual scripts of youths in The Gambia reveal that the public health approach to sexualities which concentrates on safe sex, freedom from reproductive harm and sexual infection, is only but one out of a range of emic meanings attributed to youth sexualities. The multiple uses and meanings of youth sexualities uncovered in this study highlight a complex web of meanings, many of which are far removed from health; such as enjoyment, employment, experience, experimentation, expressing resistance, escape, obligation, enticement, entrapment, personhood, etc. In order to provide services, policies, information and guidance that are relevant and useful to youths, it is important to transcend narrow conceptualisations of sexuality based on sexual and

reproductive health, and meet youths at their own terms – engage with their own meanings and understandings.

The concept of sexual rights is almost alien to the available scripts of sexualities in The Gambia. However it is one powerful framework through which diverse local groups including the different youth sub-cultures and individuals can begin to reclaim their own sexual empowerment and wellbeing. Popular nationalist discourse particularly arising from President Jammeh's official rhetoric tends to homogenise all Gambian sexualities into a marriage-based heterosexist and pronatalist version with possibilities for polygyny or monogamy. Nonconformist sub-population groups are chastised, criminalised, and more recently jailed as non-Gambian, non-African, and non-Moslem. Advocating for and adopting the sexual rights framework would allow different youth groups to claim their space, autonomy, and legitimacy to sexually self-determine; free from ageism, sexism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, religious discrimination, or paternalistic dictates from the nation-state. Combining this with the sexual health and sexual wellbeing frameworks would allow for healthy, pleasurable, and fulfilling sexualities for all Gambians – youths, adults, female, male, rural, urban or whatever else.



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## **APPENDIX I – RESEARCH THEMES**

The research explored five broad domains guided by the following research questions:

1. How are prevalent youth sub-cultures socially organised in the study setting?
2. How are diverse youth sexualities negotiated, contested and affirmed?
3. What do sexual and reproductive health mean among youths in The Gambia?
4. How do available reproductive health services match with the sexual health needs of youths?
5. How do related national policies respond to youth culture(s), sexualities, sexual and reproductive health?

## **APPENDIX II – EXPLORATORY RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- a. What is the historical perspective on youth sexualities in this social cultural context? What is the constructed ‘traditional’ sexual behaviour that was in place before the advent of HIV/AIDS? How was youth sexuality negotiated, established and challenged? **[Research method employed was literature review, archival research and key informant interviews with elderly Gambians or Gambianists.]**
- b. What are other contemporary scholars of African sexuality reporting about the impact of HIV/AIDS on the social organisation and sexuality of youths in Africa? How does this compare between and within other Anglophone or West African or Islamic countries? How does it differ within and among countries at different stages of the epidemic? How does this socio-cultural context fit in with the literature? **[Literature review predominantly used.]**
- c. What is the current level of awareness, state of knowledge and range of attitudes towards HIV/AIDS among Gambian youths? How are these three areas informed? **[Participant observation, group discussions, in-depth interviews, school essays, published KAPs.]**
- d. What is the value of sex, sexuality, abstinence, faithfulness, virginity, multiple sexual partnerships, marriage? How are issues of love, attraction, desirability, pleasure and sexuality being redefined in the face of HIV/AIDS? What other social cultural factors (religion, gender, culture, locality, peer group, media, exposure to mature AIDS patients) are at play in the rewriting of meaningful sexuality in this age of globalisation? How has HIV/AIDS coloured the language youths employ while communicating sexuality and safety? How do individual youths and diverse youth groups deal with the inherent ambivalence in



- contemporary youths sexuality: sexual maturity versus safety? **[Participant observation, focus group discussions, individual interviews.]**
- e. How does individual sexual ethos and behaviour impact on exclusion or inclusion into the prevalent youth culture? **[Participant observation, individual interviews.]**
  - f. What modes of adaptation are taking place in the sexual behaviour of youths in the era of HIV/AIDS? How are youths redefining issues of emotional expression, and restructuring negotiation of amorous relationships? How has the HIV/AIDS epidemic impacted on the social mechanisms of encoding and decoding risky social, individual and sexual behaviour? How do these youths negotiate safety, sexuality, healthy reproductive outcomes? Is the condom the only plausible and practicable adaptive measure in the face of HIV/AIDS for African youths? What aspects of traditional sexual behaviour prevalent before the advent of HIV/AIDS are no longer acceptable? How are the different strata of youth groups in The Gambia responding to and coping with the diverse effects of the pandemic? What new additions has HIV/AIDS brought to contemporary youth sexual culture in this social cultural context? **[Participant observation, in-depth interviews, group discussions]**
  - g. How are current policies, interventions or service delivery programmes adjusting in response to youth sexuality in the face of HIV/AIDS? How appropriate, relevant, accessible, affordable are they in relation to the target group? What role(s) do youths play in these social structures, institutions and programmes? **[Literature review, policy review, in-depth interviews, participant observation.]**

### APPENDIX III – INITIAL CONSENT FORM

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## London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (University of London)

Keppel Street, London, WC1E 7HT  
Switchboard: 0171-636 8636 Telex 8953474



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Dept. of Public Health & Policy, Fax: +442076375391. Email: Stella.Nyanzi@LSHTM.AC.UK

### Youth reproductive health study consent form

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_\_\_ Id no. \_\_\_\_\_

1. I have understood the information sheet concerning this study and I understand what will be required of me if I take part in the study.
2. I am satisfied that my questions concerning this study have been answered.
3. I am aware that any time I may withdraw from this study without giving a reason and without affecting my normal care and management.
4. I agree to take part in this study.

Signed ..... Date .....

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information: Stella Nyanzi 0778879 Ousman Bah 0958494



APPENDIX IV – REVISED CONSENT FORM

**London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine**  
(University of London)

Keppel Street, London, WC1E 7HT  
Switchboard: 0171-636 8636 Telex 8953474



Dept. of Public Health & Policy, Fax: +442076375391. Email: Stella.Nyanzi@LSHTM.AC.UK

**Youth reproductive health study consent form**

Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Site: \_\_\_\_\_ Id no. \_\_\_\_\_

1. I have understood the information sheet concerning this study and I understand what will be required of me if I take part in the study.
2. I am satisfied that my questions concerning this study have been answered.
3. I am aware that any time I may withdraw from this study without giving a reason and without affecting my normal care and management.
4. I agree to take part in this study.
5. I authorize the researcher to publish data (pictures, notes, conversations) generated from interacting with me.

Signed ..... Date .....

Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX V – INFORMATION SHEET

### London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (University of London)



Keppel Street, London, WC1E 7HT

Dept. of Public Health & Policy, Fax:+44 2076375391, Email:

Stella.Nyanzi@LSHTM.AC.UK

*For the interviewer: For those participants who cannot read, please explain the study before recruitment. It is important they understand that they are free to refuse to join the study.*

#### Youth reproductive health study information sheet

We are working with a research student from London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. She is an anthropologist who is interested in learning about youth cultures. Her study requires that she conducts research about sexuality and reproductive health among both rural and urban youths in The Gambia. She is trying to understand how youths manage this sphere of their lives. We shall be speaking with youths as well as adults who are involved in the reproductive health of youths including teachers, parents, community leaders, reproductive health service deliverers, policy makers, youth role models and any other social actors. We have come to you because we are interested in finding out what you see, hear, know, do and think about the topic.

We will collect information using four methods. For social mapping of youths' contexts, we will have three rounds of essay writing competitions advertised in the national media and at youth forums. Then we shall hold focus group discussions in the rural and urban settings, with an average of ten participants. The third method involves in-depth one-to-one interviews with youths and key informants. Lastly, the student will use participant observation to better appreciate the realities of the people she will be studying. Her interaction with the rural youths may involve use of participatory rural appraisal techniques, in order to bridge gaps created by illiteracy.

All the information that you give us will be recorded by tape recorder and/ or written down, transcribed, translated into English and entered into a computer under an identification number to facilitate confidentiality. Only the three qualified research staff will handle your data.

Transport allowances will be given to each participant to facilitate their travel to activity venues. Please sign against your name when you receive the allowance. During discussions, each participant will have some refreshments. The winners of the essay competitions will be given monetary prizes, the value of which will be decided in consultation with national youth leaders. At the end of the study, a workshop will be organized to give feedback and respond to unresolved queries emerging from the research.

During the workshop, health information as well as answers to all your questions will be given by experts. Do you have any questions about this study?

*For the interviewer: Please write down and respond to any queries that are raised.*



APPENDIX VI – LSHTM ETHICS APPROVAL

LONDON SCHOOL OF HYGIENE  
& TROPICAL MEDICINE

ETHICS COMMITTEE

APPROVAL FORM

Application number: 1065



Name of Principal Investigator Stella Nyanzi

Department Public Health and Policy

Head of Department Gill Walt

Title: Renegotiating sexuality, rewriting social scripts for meaningful reproductive health outcomes: An ethnography of youths in the Gambia

Approval of this study is granted by the Committee.

Chair ..... *T. W. Meade* .....  
Professor Tom Meade

Date ..... *23. 3. 2004* .....

Approval is dependent on local ethical approval having been received.

Any subsequent changes to the consent form must be re-submitted to the Committee.

## APPENDIX VII – NCAC APPROVAL AND RESEARCH PERMIT



**NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE  
RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION  
NATIONAL MUSEUM PREMISES  
INDEPENDENCE DRIVE  
BANJUL THE GAMBIA**

17<sup>th</sup> December 2003

### **RESEARCH PERMIT**

NUMBER: 22

Dear Sir/Madam,

REF: APPLICATION FOR RESEARCH PERMIT OF 17<sup>th</sup> December 2003

**SUBJECT: ETHNOGRAPHY AND MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

This is to inform you that approval has been given for you to conduct research in The Gambia in accordance with the following conditions:

1. That you leave copies of all tape-recorded and other written materials collected in The Gambia, including interviews, music, stories, history, cultural information, etc with the **RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION** before leaving this country.
2. That you provide all relevant data about the tapes and the written materials, such as names, dates addresses of informants, etc which are necessary for cataloguing and for critical evaluation of the material.
3. I am further to inform you that the material to be copied must be left with the **RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION** well before you leave this country in order to allow time for copying. A copy of your research paper should also be deposited at the **RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION** after submitting it to your institution.
4. All material objects and antiques collected in connection with the research must pass through the **RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION** and the **MUSEUM AND MONUMENTS DIVISION** respectively for certification before transportation outside the country.
5. Meanwhile, all the research materials deposited will remain closed to private research scholars for three years from date of deposit, unless you give written instructions to the contrary. This is to allow you time to complete your research paper. The Government, however, reserves the right to allow bona fide Government Officers access to any materials which will enable them to carry out their official duties. Any Government report drawing from materials deposited by private scholars must nevertheless acknowledge the source of that information.



In no instance, however, will any deposited material be given to public officials working in a private capacity until the three-year term has expired.

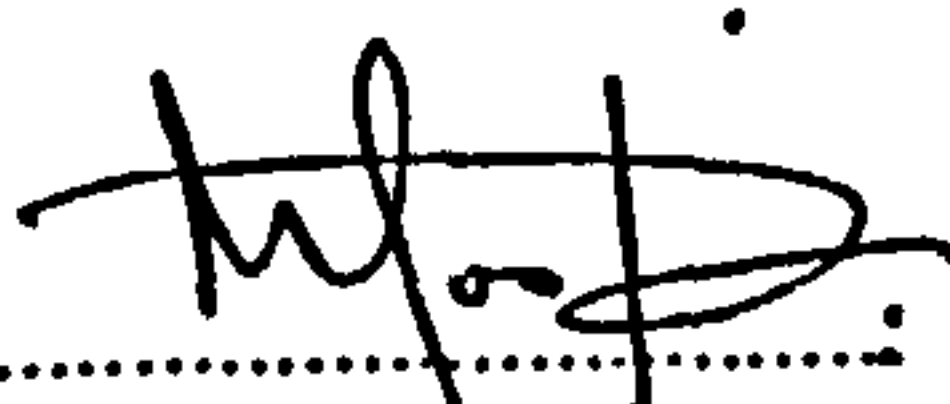
6. That this permit is valid for (3 Years)

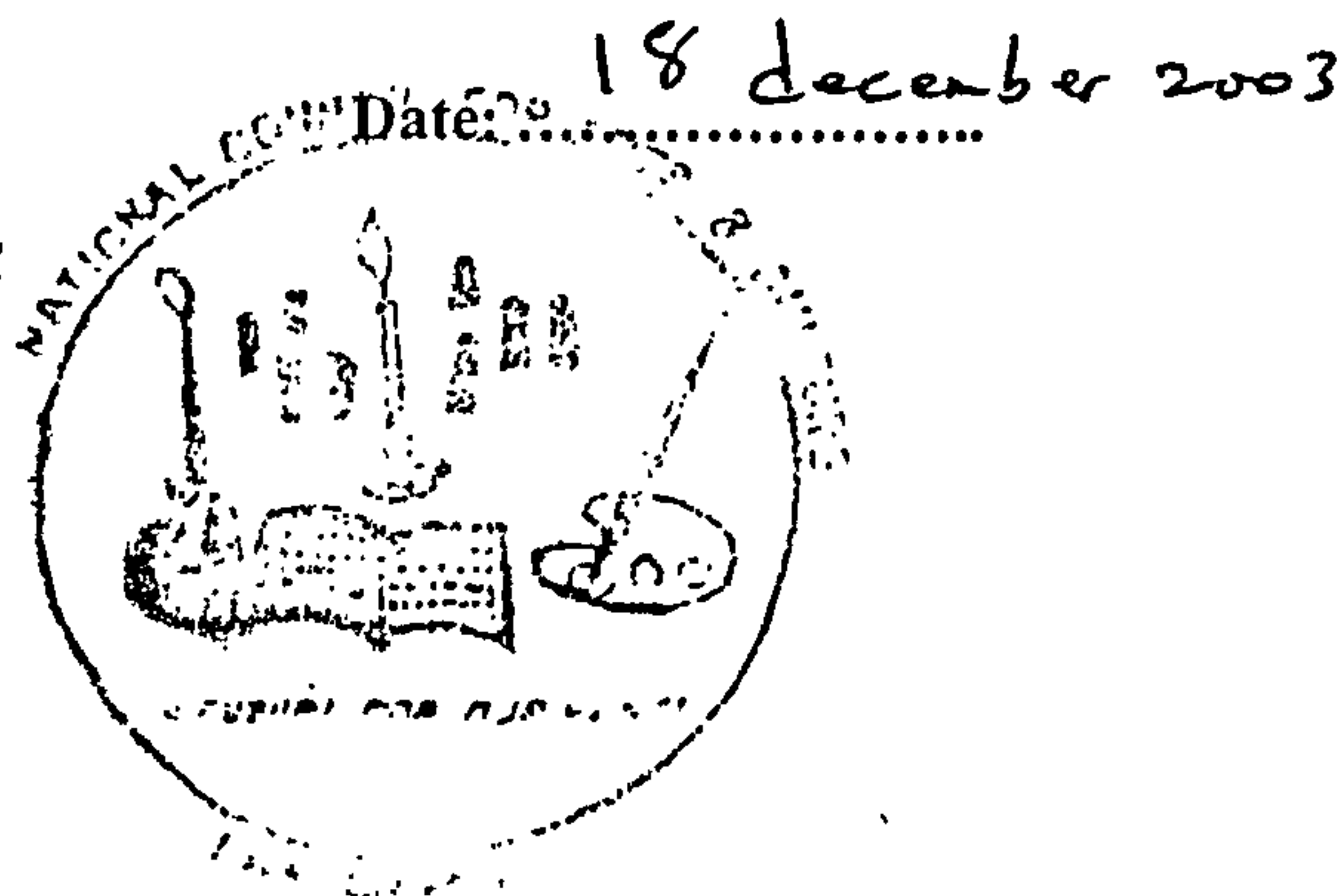
with effect from 17<sup>th</sup> December 2003

expiring on the – 17<sup>th</sup> December 2006

if you find it necessary to stay beyond that period, the **RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION** and the **IMMIGRATION DEPARTMENT** of the Ministry of Interior should be informed in advance of the expiry date for clearance.

7. This office wishes you every success in your undertakings.

Signed   
Momodou C. Joof  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NCAC



TO Ms. Stella Nyanzi  
P.O. Box 2191  
Serrekunda  
K.S.M.D  
The Gambia

EXTENSION REQUIRED: YES/NO

EXPIRY DATE: .....

POSITION: .....

DATE: .....

SIGNATURE: .....





APPLICATION FOR A RESEARCH PERMIT

(All blank space should be filled out in English and be typewritten or legibly printed in block letters).

1. ~~Mr/Ms~~/Miss: STELLA NYANZI  
(Enter full name, underline family name)
2. Nationality: UGANDAN
3. Place of birth: UGANDA Date of birth: 16 JUNE 1974
4. Number of passport: B0391608 Date of issue: 11/09/2003
5. Permanent home address: P.O-BOX 788 MASAKA, UGANDA
6. Country of present residence: THE GAMBIA
7. Postal address (if different from above): P.O BOX 2191, SERREKUNDA
8. Address in The Gambia (if non-resident in The Gambia) during the period of research:  
KOTU - MANS
9. Field of study: ETHNOGRAPHY + MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
(e.g. Ethnography, Archaeology, History, Social-Anthropology, Ethnomusicology, Linguistics, etc.)
10. Highest educational standard attained: MSc MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
(e.g. Diploma, B.A., B.Sc., M.A., M.Sc., M.Phil., PhD, etc.)
11. Books, articles and thesis published: 2003. MOBILITY AND SEXUALITY OF BODABODAMEI IN UGANDA. 2002, EMPOWERMENT AND HEALTH OF MARKET WOMEN IN UGANDA. 2001, HEALING OF HIV/AIDS IN UGANDA. 2001, BREAST FEEDING PRACTICES IN UGANDA.
12. Research emphasis (summarize only in space below the purpose and nature of your research): YOUTH CULTURES, SEXUALITY, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND POLICY IN RURAL AND URBAN GAMBIA.
13. What part of the country do you intend conducting the research:  
KOMBOS AND FARAFENNI.



14. Duration of stay in The Gambia:..... 3 YEARS .....

15. Institution or organization you are conducting research for  
(Attach a xerox copy of testimonial or letter of attestation from your institution)

..... LONDON SCHOOL OF HYGIENE AND TROPICAL MEDICINE .....

16. Fellowship or scholarship you are holding:

..... SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL / COUNCIL FOR DEVELOPMENT  
OF SOCIAL RESEARCH IN AFRICA .....

17. I understand and accept that the Government reserves the right to take any action as may be deemed necessary, if I fail to provide the right information on this form.

I, therefore, make this solemn declaration that the information given on this form is complete and accurate to the best of my knowledge.

Done at:..... BANJUL .....

(City)

Date:..... 17/12/2003 .....

Signature:..... Stella Nyanzi .....

(Researcher)

---

---

**FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY**

APPLICATION: APPROVED/NOT APPROVED PERMIT NO:.....

EXPIRY DATE:.....

SIGNATURE.....

POSITION:.....

DATE:.....

EXTENSION REQUESTED: YES/NO

EXPIRY DATE:..... SIGNATURE..... POSITION..... DATE.....

**NOTE: A NON-REFUNDABLE FEE OF D250.00 SHOULD ACCOMPANY THIS APPLICATION FORM.**

## AGREEMENT FORM

NAME OF APPLICANT: STELLA NYANZI

RESEARCH SUBJECT: ETHNOGRAPHY OF YOUTH CULTURE, SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN RURAL & URBAN GAMBIA.

APPLICATION DATE: 17/12/2003

IN THE EVENT I AM OFFERED A RESEARCH PERMIT, I UNDERSTAND AND AGREE:

1. That I leave copies of all tape-recorded and other materials collected in The Gambia, including interviews, music, stories, history, cultural information, etc with the RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION before leaving this country.

2. That I provide all relevant data about the tapes, which are necessary for cataloguing and critical evaluation of the material.

3. That I deposit the material copied with the RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION before submitting it to my institution.

4. That all material objects and antiques collected in connection with my research must pass through the RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION and the MUSEUM AND MONUMENTS DIVISION respectively before transportation outside The Gambia.

6. That, although the research material deposited will remain closed to private researchers for three years from the date of deposit, unless I give written instruction to the contrary, the Government reserves the right to allow BONA FIDE Government Officers access to any of my materials which will better enable them to carry out their official duties. Such Government reports shall, however, acknowledge the source of that information.

SIGNED: Stella Nyanzi DATE: 17/12/2003


TO:  
NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE  
RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION DIVISION  
INDEPENDENCE DRIVE  
BANJUL/THE GAMBIA



## NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

**Cash / ~~Cheque~~ Receipt**CR NO. *02391*.....DATE: *18-12-2013*.....RECEIVED FROM: *Stella Nyazi*.....AMOUNT IN WORDS: *Two hundred and fifty lakhs only*.....RESPECT OF: *Research Permit*.....

NO: .....

D. *257*.....

TREASURER/ACCOUNTS CLERKS

P.M.B. 151

TEL: 29543, 26244





# NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

General Secretariat  
National Museum Premises  
Independence Drive  
Banjul

NCAC/GS/008/02/(60)

26<sup>th</sup> October 2004

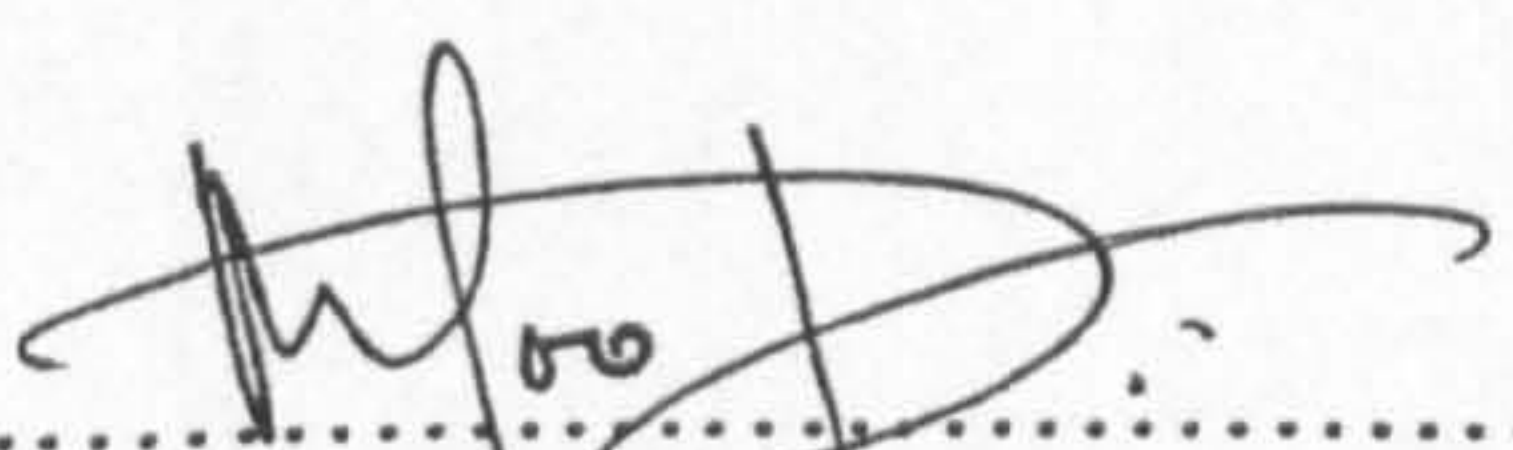
**The Director**  
Dept. of Immigration  
Banjul

**RE: MS. STELLA NYANZI A RESEARCH STUDENT OF  
ETHNOGRAPHY AND MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

I write to certify that Ms. Stella Nyanzi, a Ugandan, holds a valid research permit from this institution to conduct research in the Gambia on the above mentioned subjects.

The research permit was issued to Ms. Nyanzi on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2003, and should expire on 17 December 2006.

It would therefore be highly appreciated if all possible assistance is accorded to Ms. Nyanzi in the furtherance of her academic pursuits.

  
.....  
**Momodou C Joof**  
**FOR: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**



**"A FUTURE FOR OUR PAST"**

Tel: (220) 227461 / 229730 / 226244 / 374740 Fax: (220) 227461  
Email: [musmon@qanet.gm](mailto:musmon@qanet.gm)



## APPENDIX VIII – THEORETIC CONSIDERATIONS

### *Social constructionism, interpretive symbolic interactionism and critical theory*

Informed by an epistemological position of social constructionism, the theoretical framework triangulates both interpretive theory with critical social theory. While some scholars argue against the possibility of combining the two theoretical approaches because the former avoids political engagement and the latter is by nature emancipatory – often leading to social action, others (Denzin 1992, Clough 1992, Holstein and Miller 1993) believe it is useful to use them in combination because it reveals both the ways in which people are socialised to accept the view of dominant ideologies and institutions, and how they creatively resist and transform these definitions (Agger 1998).

Rooted in American pragmatism, symbolic interactionism is a social theory which presently comes in many versions: social psychology following from Mead-Blumer traditions, urban sociology from Hughes-Becker, Durkheimian structuralism from Goffman, and statistical interactionism from the Iowa school (Meltzer et al 1975). In its canonical version (Blumer 1969), symbolic interactionism is based on three assumptions: ‘human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them’, the meanings of things arise out of the process of social interaction, meanings are modified through an interpretive process which involves self-reflective individuals symbolically interacting with one another. Interpretive symbolic interactionism (Denzin 1992, 1989, 1990) approaches materials from a narrative, textual position, understanding that the texts create the subject matter written about (Brown 1989, Richardson 1990).

Under critical theory the work of Derrida, Foucault and Lyotard, particularly from the perspective of how they challenge positivism and authoritarian totalising ‘metanarratives’ informs the theoretical framework. Deconstruction, post-structuralism, postmodernism,

and post-feminism make important contributions. Polyvocality (Bakhtin 1978, 1994) is the common thread running through all these critical theories together.

Deconstruction (Derrida 1981, 1982, 1986, 1988, Norris 1983, Sarrup 1988, Culler 1982, Gergen 1999, Sin and van Loon 2001) is a branch of post-structuralism which sustains critical attack on structuralism as propounded by both Saussure and Levi-Strauss. Derrida maintains that structuralism is both authoritarian in manner, and based on questionable philosophical premises; the West assumes 'logocentrism' or a 'metaphysics of presence' – in other words an assumption that when a speaker or writer uses a word, its full meaning is present in their mind. Drawing from early semiotic theory Derrida views language as a system of differences. Therefore meanings of a term depend on differentiating between the presence and the absence of what is designated by that word. This implies a 'massive suppression of meaning'. The absences give meaning to the presence. Furthermore, the meaning is obtained through deferral to several other terms that are also multi-layered. Therefore words bear traces of meaning from various linguistic or textual histories. This is the process of 'difference' (Derrida 1981) which reveals that the transparent presence of meaning can never be achieved because it is a transitory unstable phenomenon. Instead it is better to work within an unbounded field of meaning, particularly due to the apparent gaps in existent systems of discourse that arise out of the suppressed 'surplus' of meaning at any one point. The theory's political implications are based on its objection of structuralism's dependence on binary oppositions because the dominant term takes priority over the other. Examples of politically loaded binary include man/ woman, white/ black, and straight/ gay. In the words of Sin and van Loon (2001), 'Deconstruction is a philosophy which very self-consciously sets out to deflate philosophical pretensions about our ability to order the world'.



Foucault (1961, 1975, 1963) criticises the rigidity of structuralism and its insistence of neatly classifying everything in terms of the system-bound role because this implies the exclusion or marginalisation of some vulnerable social groups (including the mentally ill, criminals, the physically ill, homosexuals) in the name of order. His three-volume History of sexuality (1976-1984) examines how homosexuality which was accepted behaviour in Greek culture was gradually criminalized, making heterosexuality a dominant norm. The goal of Foucault's historical researches brought to the fore the suppressed discourses in Western society. His work reveals that humans stress difference rather than common elements.

According to Lyotard (1984) postmodernism is characterised by an 'incredulity towards metanarratives'. In his critic of modernism, he argues that is suppressed 'differends' – that is irresolvable disputes in which neither side cannot accept the other's terms of reference. In The post modern condition (1979), Lyotard argues for the voices of the 'little narratives' contained in any society. He asserts that unless differends are respected, authoritarianism – in which many voices are simply silenced by the superior force of their opponents – is propagated (see also Lyotard 1988).

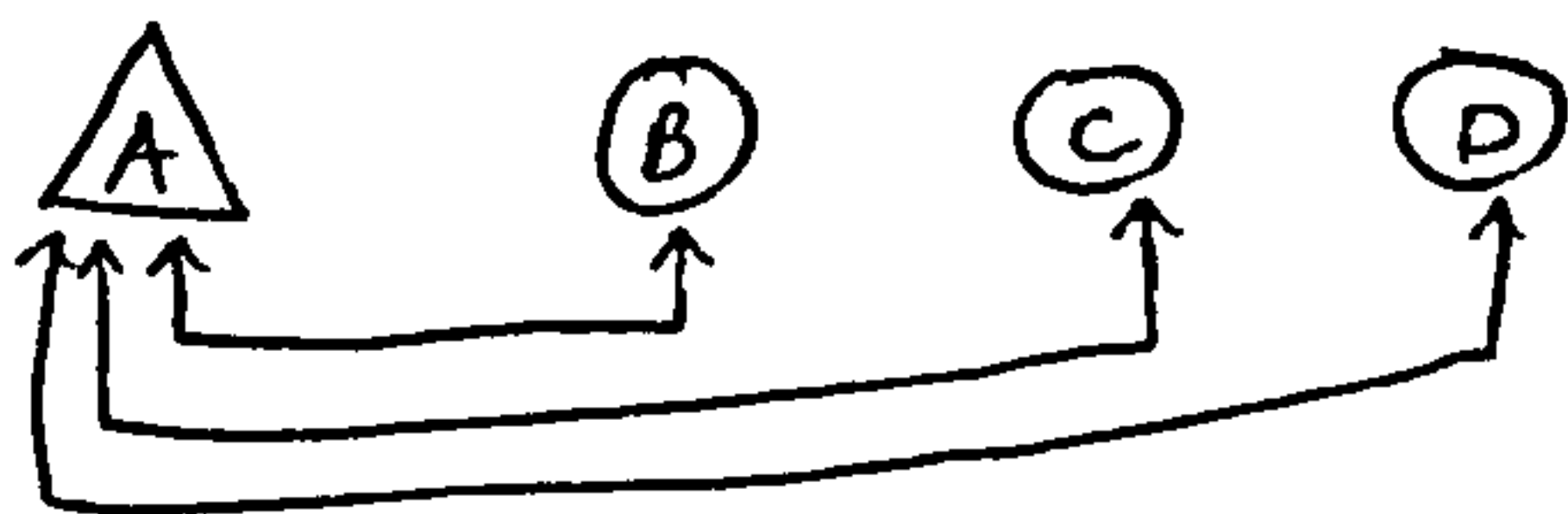
Post-feminism (Coward 1984, 1993, 1999, Whelehan 1995) is a new wave of feminism which criticises the more doctrinaire forms of Western feminist thought particularly the 'grand narrative' of second-wave feminism with its essentialist bias and separatist sympathies. Post-feminism challenges the Womanist cult of perspectives like *Ecriture Feminine* (Cixous 1986, 1988) which assumes that the female perspective is by definition the only correct one particularly because it leads to biological essentialism. It argues for representations of positive womanhood; stressing a move away from the culture of victimhood in which women are always only victims of patriarchy, male sexuality, etc towards more positive images of women as choosing from a range of lifestyles.

Lastly aspects of postcolonial theory including anti-colonialism (Fanon 1952, 1961, Childs & Williams 1996, Moores-Gilbert 1997), hybridity (Bhabha 1994, Dayan 1996, Gilroy 1993) and African feminism (Mikell 1997, Newell 1997, Nnaemeka 1997, 1998, Scott 1995, Terborg-Penn & Rushing 1996) are potentially relevant.





A is husband to B.  
B is wife to A.



A is husband to B, C, D.

B is first wife to A.

B is co-wife to C, D.

B is senior wife to C, D.

C is second wife to A.

C is co-wife to B, D.

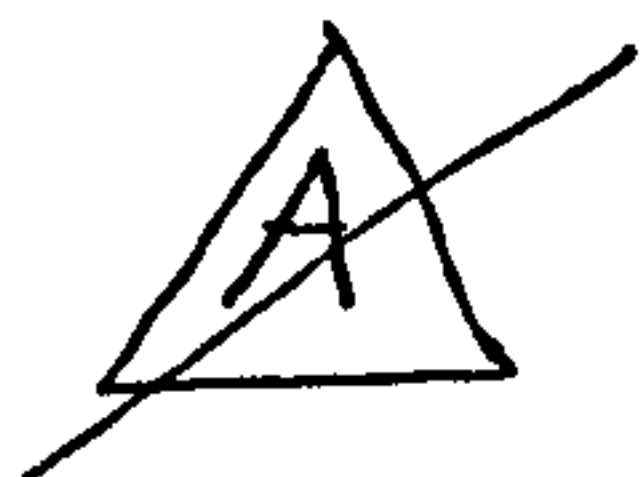
C is junior wife to B.

C is senior wife to D.

D is third wife to A.

D is co-wife to B, C.

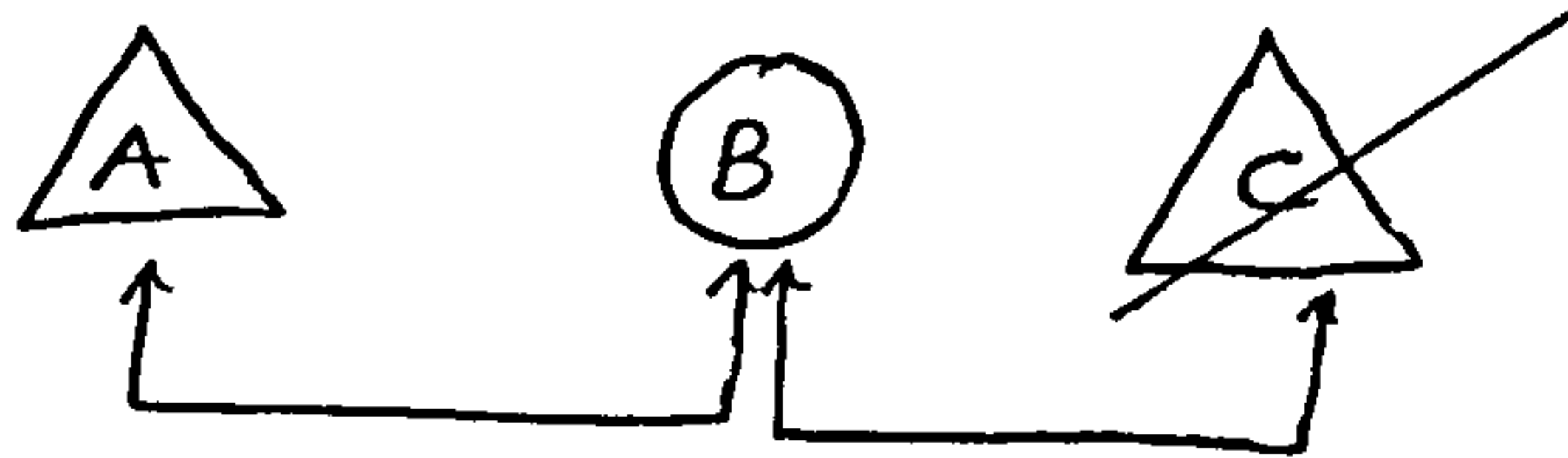
D is junior wife to B, C.



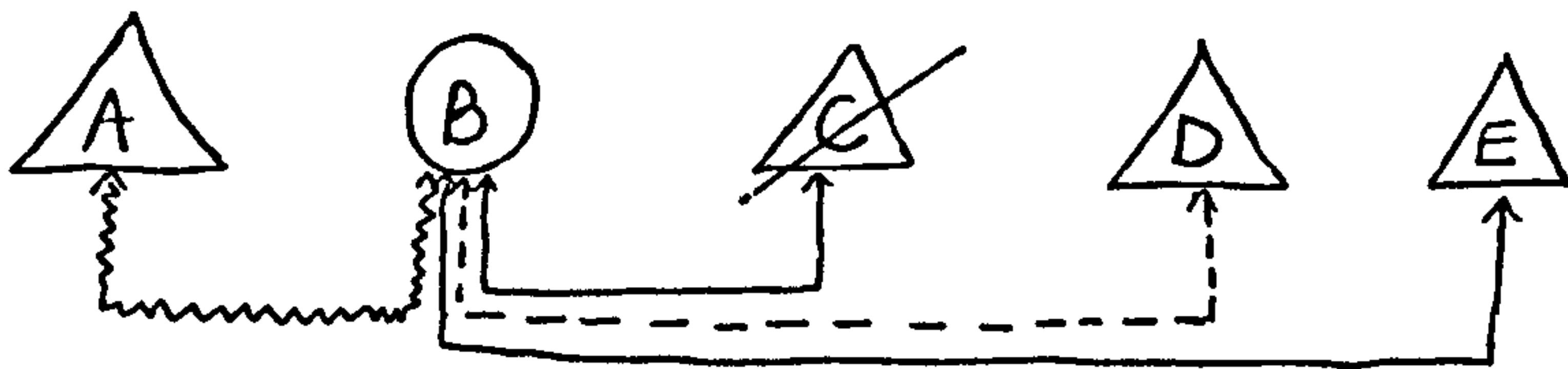
A is dead.



A is sexually related to M but not formalised through marriage



B is widowed because she was married to C who is dead.  
B is also married to



B divorced from A.

B is remarried to E.

B has a sexual relationship with D.

B is also C's widow.

A is married to B.

A and B are parents to X, Y, Z.

X, Y, Z are children to A, B.

A is a father to X, Y, Z.

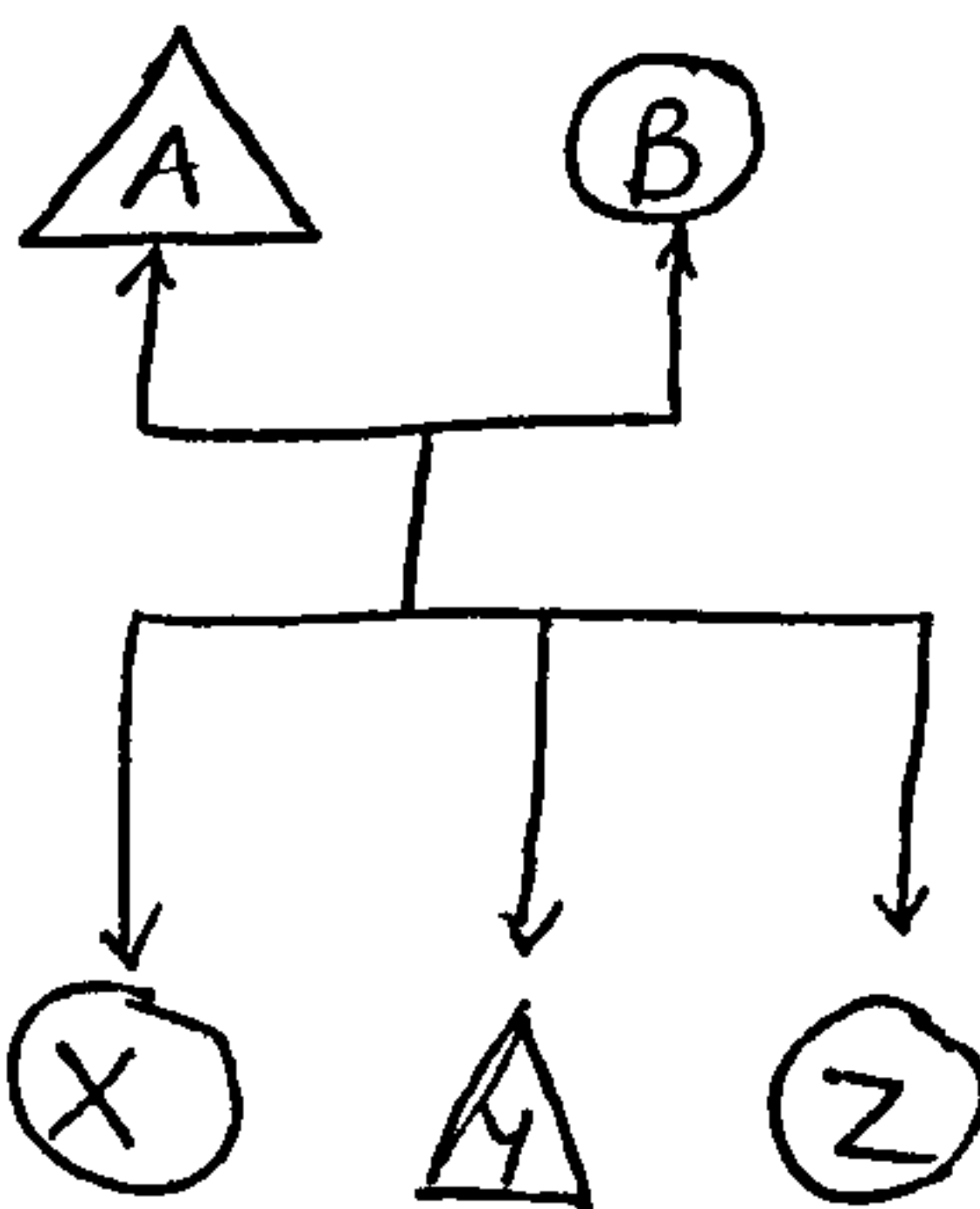
B is a mother to X, Y, Z.

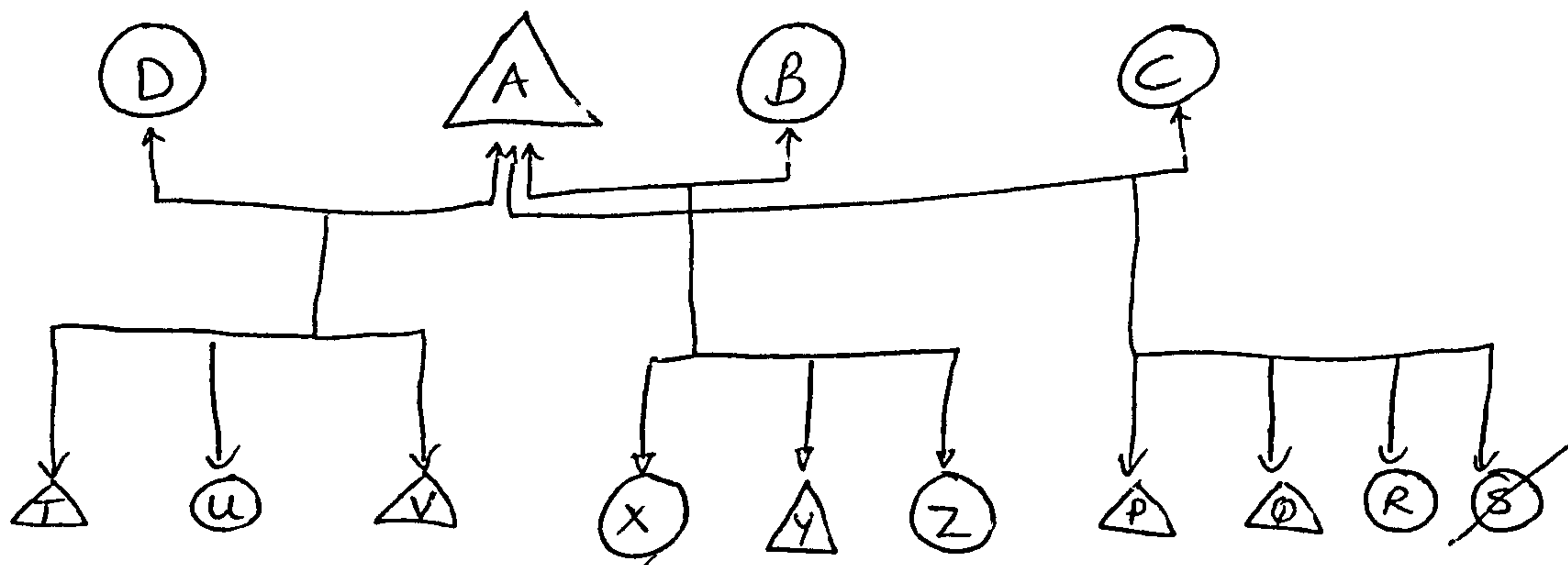
X, Y and Z are siblings.

X is a daughter to A, B and sister to Y, Z.

Y is a son to A, B and brother to X, Z.

Z is a daughter to A, B and sister to Y, X.



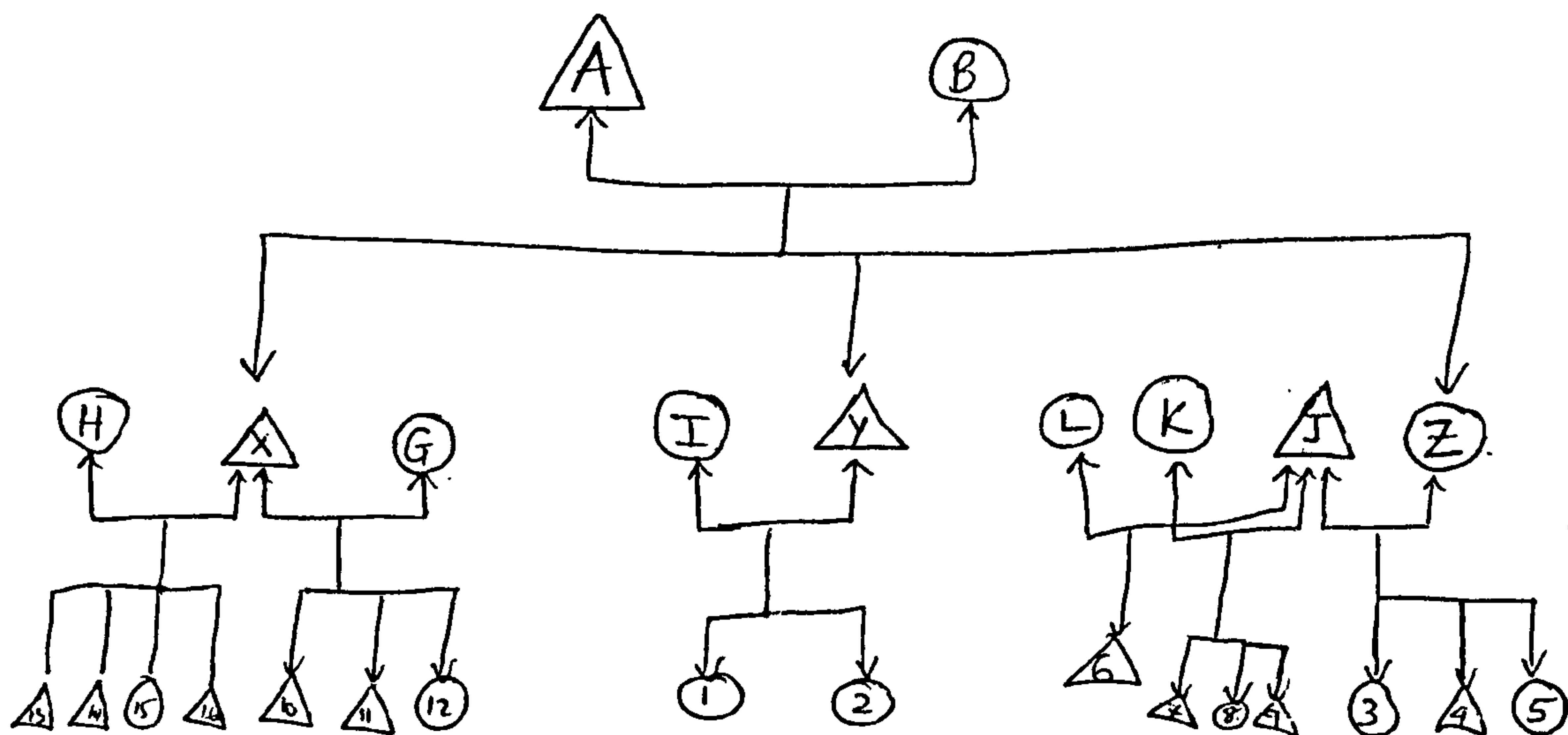


A is a polygynous man with three wives B, C, D.

D has two sons and one daughter, who have two sets of step-brothers and step-sisters from their two step-mothers. In Gambian households, these distinctions between step-relations were not usually used unless I asked people to specify. They tended to refer to each other either as sister, brother, mother, daughter, even though they were referring to step-relatives. So even though D is a step-mother to X, X would refer to her as 'My mother'. When pressed to identify, she could say 'My mother, the senior wife of my father'. Likewise T would refer to C as mother, and in some households as 'Bride' - the name commonly given to the youngest co-wife in a compound.

While U and X are step-brother and step-sister, they usually referred to each other as brother and sister. It was separatist to use any other nouns to describe their relationship, according to everyday local usage.





A is grandfather to 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16

B is grandmother to 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16.

A and B are grandparents-through-marriage to 6, 7, 8, 9.

A and B are maternal grandparents to 3, 4, 5, and 1, 2.

A and B are grandparents by blood to 13, 14, 15, 16, 10, 11, 12, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

A is a father-in-law to H, G, I, and J.

A is a father-in-law by marriage to L and K.

B is a mother-in-law to H, G, I, and J.

B is a mother-in-law by marriage to L and K.

X is a polygynous man with two wives H and G.

Y is monogamous with only one wife

Z is married into a polygynous union to J who also has K and L as other wives.

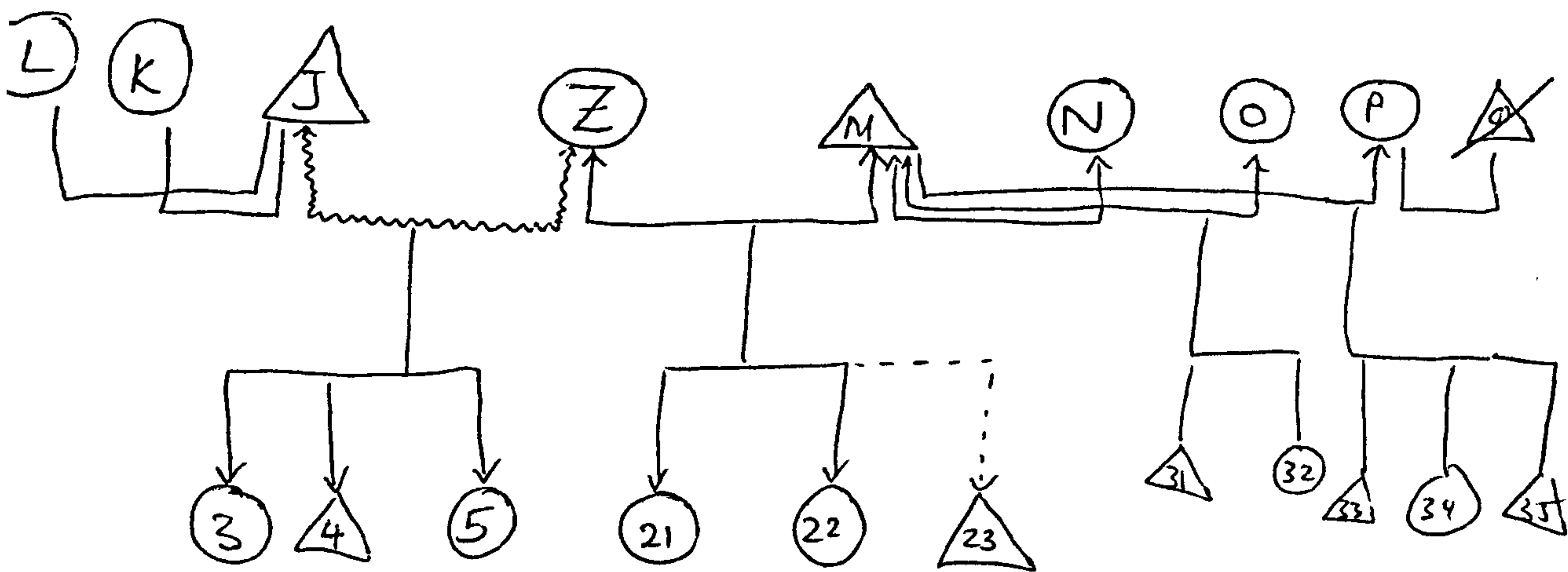
Z is a sister-in-law to I, G, H.

Y is a brother-in-law to H, G, J.

X is a brother-in-law to I, J.

What was interesting was working out relatedness at the more complex levels, for example the relationship between X and L, or G and A or T and B.

Furthermore, divorce, remarriage and adoption, all complicated relationships more, for me as an outsider and observer. For example if Z divorces J and remarries M who is polygynous, and they have two natural children and one adopted child. This was typical, not extraordinary.



When 3 told me that 32 was a sister, it was interesting working out the relatedness in relation to family tree diagrams.

Or when 23 referred to J as a father, that too was interesting.



## **APPENDIX X – LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

I encountered some limitations during the course of this study. Some pertained to the organisational phase, the fieldwork, data processing, analysis and writing up of the ethnography.

Time was of essence particularly because of the scheduled nature of doctorate studies in British universities. As a fulltime research degree student, my course was strictly limited to at least three academic years, and at most four years. Within this limitation I was expected to complete all requirements of the PhD degree including the taught component (where necessary) based in the United Kingdom, the library research, the fieldwork, data processing, analyses, thesis writing, submission, defence in the form of a viva, and correction. Therefore I had to develop and exercise my management abilities particularly by mastering the skills of prioritising, informed selectivity, delegation of some tasks to my research team members, goal-setting, scheduling, working to tight deadlines, progress monitoring, and evaluation. The objectives of the study helped guide the direction of the study, and facilitated effective activity selection and scheduling. Some emergent questions were left unexplored due to this limitation. They form part of the way forward that this study could take in the post-doctoral stage. Another strategy I adopted to tackle this limitation of time, was that I took to effective multi-tasking such as doing the literature review while transcribing, translating, conducting data entry, or otherwise interviewing participants while also writing up preliminary interpretations, and analyses of specific themes close to reaching their point of circulation.

Similar to the experiences of other ethnographic researchers in the social sciences, I found that there were relatively much less research funds available to scholars using qualitative research methods. This was particularly true for projects such as mine that proposed to appropriate ethnographic participant observation, for a vaguely unspecified

period, with an open research agenda that would develop in interaction with the fieldwork and field experience. Cresswell 1998:17 describes these projects as belonging to ‘...a form of social and human science research that does not have firm guidelines or specific procedures and is evolving and changing constantly. This complicates telling others how one plans to conduct a study and how others might judge it when the study is done.’ Though fully funded for three academic years (i.e. 2003/2004 to 2006/2007) as a Ford Foundation fellow of the IFP, these funds did not stretch to cover my varied research expenses. Thus I had to develop and exercise my fundraising abilities by submitting applications for research funds. Planning for the funds obtained through successful applications matured my budgeting and cost-cutting skills. The limited funds available to me for research necessitated selectivity of research activities, restriction of the study sites covered, a control over the eventual sample size of study participants reached, the entire scope and size of the study. This yielded a sharper focus of the research questions, more systematic scheduling of activities conducted, and a manageable research project. There was an added advantage of receiving pockets of research funds from different organisations; namely the assessment, deadlines, monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms imposed by the funding bodies facilitated an external system of auditing for this study. As I submitted periodic reports, and assessed my achievements over the initial set objectives for the funders’ review boards, I was simultaneously evaluating the progress of the study. Therefore even though the limitation of funds was a challenge, its solution yielded unanticipated advantages to the study.

Another limitation of the study concerned my person as the primary instrument of research (see Ortner 1995). In addition to my dynamic, fluid and multiple identities (see chapter 1 for a discussion) was the fact that I was initially employed for a year by the MRC Laboratories in The Gambia to work as a local anthropologist on a study about the



demand for malaria treatment and preventive measures. Therefore my introduction to the rural study population was in a role different to the eventual role I took on for the subsequent four years of my doctoral research. This had mixed results. The advantage was that I learnt the local language, customs, practices and everyday way of life prior to embarking on my research study. It provided me with a year of introduction to and settlement into my study area and to the participants; even though I was investigating a different study topic. However a disadvantage was the persistent confusion of roles by some of my participants. This was especially true for those who actually interacted and worked with me while I was in MRC employment. Their expectations of me in this case were often exaggerated and unattainable, for example they often asked me to give them free bed-nets, or provide free medical treatment for their ill household members who may not be participating in my study, or to create for them free access and referral to well-known specialists based in the MRC, etc. It took many explanations on my part to reduce this occurrence. It was also important that my research team always reiterated the general information about my ethnographic study, as encapsulated in the information sheet (see appendix 5). However as experienced by Honwana (2006) during her fieldwork, for many locales it is neither important nor common practice for them to distinguish the specific roles of the different foreigners who crisscross into their lives (see also Jones 1999). An independent academic researcher is quickly tagged along with NGO workers, as well as development workers, foreign investors, etc. When it is of significance to distinguish their individual roles, the onus lies upon each researcher to spell out what they would prefer to be identified and recognised as. And yet even when this was done, study participants made up their own minds about how they labelled, categorised and identified the foreign researchers.

As discussed in chapter 2, my local language abilities were limited. This necessitated my need for a translator for the main part of the study, especially when I was interacting or conversing with people who could not ably express themselves in English. This limitation was compounded by the fact that rather than speaking one common local language in a particular study site, it was the practice that different ethnic tribes lived side by side and thus the need for me to quickly gain knowledge and fluency of at least three main vernaculars namely Wollof, Mandinka, and Fula. However these were just three popular languages out of a list of many others that were spoken. While it was challenging for me to ably communicate with non-English speakers in the initial stages of the fieldwork, I quickly learnt elementary words and expressions to facilitate some level of basic conversation. With time I developed enough vocabulary and knowledge of local grammars to ably hold my own in Wollof that was widely spoken in both my rural and urban study sites, even by members of ethnic groups that were not Wollof. I also maintained the presence of multi-lingual Gambian research assistants who were fluent in several local dialects including Fula, Mandinka, Wollof, Serer, Jolla, Karoninka, Aku and Jahanke. This developed the muscle of my research team; meant that I always had a local perspective even while away from the field. It also gave my research multiple angles of interpretation, and analysis because I worked through the field data with at least one translator or research assistant.

Finally the demands of a PhD research project sometimes required that I disrupt my schedule so as to attend to academic procedure and protocol. This on occasion acted against the natural flow of data, particularly when I had to prematurely cut myself away from the field so as to attend to school requirements. An early example involved the LSHTM requirements for research degree students to attend a year of taught classes, during which time they were to develop a research proposal largely based on review of



literature. It was only after successfully presenting and defending the proposed research document in an up-grading open seminar and a closed session with an examination committee, that one could proceed to the field to start data collection. However in my case, with the support of my supervisor, advisory committee and unit research degrees' coordinator, I was able to commence on fieldwork immediately after the three first months of registration as required by the LSHTM regulations (see yellow book 2003). My up-grading seminar occurred two years into my registration, because it was important I paid attention to the fieldwork so as to develop a proper research proposal. In this case, I was able to negotiate the course of my PhD with the LSHTM authority, and subsequently divert from the established and commonly adhered to procedure of doctorate research. Another prime example occurred at the end of my third academic year when I decided it was imperative that I left the field so as to process the data collected up to that stage in order to finalise my thesis for submission to my examiners. However as indicated in the discussion of my ethnographic cycle of emergent research questions (see chapter 2), there are virgin issues that I left untouched by my probing finger of qualitative investigation, even at the end of the end of the fieldwork.

## ***Appendix 11: The Power of Ethnography***

This is my preferred beginning to the thesis. It is reflexive. It describes my development as an ethnographer of sexualities. It reveals the variety of subjectivities I brought to the work. Although my examiners did not like it, I append it to the thesis because for me, my subjectivities are integral to my scholarship. Furthermore, 'it would be very useful for us, as social scientists, to be more introspective about our unstated beliefs and their influence on our conclusions' (Thornton 2001:460).

*...the attempt to understand another life world using the self as the instrument of knowing...*  
Ortner (1995:173)

*When I was young and free  
And my imaginations had no limits  
I dreamt of changing the world.*

*As I grew older and wiser  
I realised that the world would not change  
So I shortened my sights somewhat  
And decided to change my country  
But it too would not change*

*As I grew into my twilight years  
I decided to change my family,  
Those closest to me  
But they too would have none of it.*

*And now as I lay on my deathbed  
I suddenly realise that if I had only changed myself first  
Then by inspiration I would have been able to change my family,  
And by extension my country  
And who knows, even the world?*

*These words were found at the tomb of an Anglican priest.<sup>1</sup>*

Yielding to the need for personal change from within, threatens many people. Admitting that the research process transformed the researcher, appears to challenge several scholars – particularly those more predisposed to positivistic approaches. Academics report about how the research process changed their study designs, conceptual frameworks, theories, methods of data collection or analysis, the expected results, and so forth. Everything changes, but their person.

In this chapter I describe my transformational experiences as an ethnographer. 'In order to know where one is going, it is important to appreciate where one is coming from.'<sup>2</sup> Thus, employing the metaphor of a cockroach's stages of metamorphosis, I discuss four main

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<sup>1</sup> An email circulated on the mailing list for Ford Foundation –IFP fellows on 23/12/2005 at 10:20AM.

<sup>2</sup> Luganda proverb



subsections of my trajectory as an ethnographer. The egg stage covers my birth as an ethnographer, focusing on the period prior to fieldwork in the research setting for my doctoral research. The larva stage then discusses my first visit and introduction to The Gambia as an ethnographic site. The nymph stage discusses the thrust of my transformational experiences as an ethnographer of sexuality among youths in The Gambia. The adult cockroach stage deals with conflicts within myself about my authority to conduct analysis of ethnographic data and write up the ethnography.

Thereafter I present two of my genealogies to contextualise and give meaning to my location as a researcher. In this section I examine my positionality as an ethnographic researcher of sexuality and health among youths in sub-Saharan Africa. My genealogy as an ethnographer perhaps explains my theoretical stance(s), methodological praxis, interpretational perspectives and style of presentation. After all, ‘one can tell a child by looking at whose breast-milk they sucked.’<sup>3</sup> My family genealogy clarifies the complexities of multiple identities encamped in my person – a characteristic perhaps not strange to several contemporary Africans. It explains why I am male and female at the same time; why I am Muslim, Anglican Protestant of Church of Uganda distinction, Born-Again Pentecostal affiliated to multiple denominations and an African-Kiganda spiritualist in one breath; why I am Muganda Ugandan, but perhaps also a Fula Gambian of Puul Habobe distinction; why I am East, West and sub-Saharan African; why I am very rural and yet also peri-urban and cosmopolitan urban – both local and global, belonging to both the village and the international scene; African and yet also Westernised. This awareness of the bottomless depth of who I am as a person, perhaps explains the ease with which I ooze into diverse roles depending on the context; maybe unlike a bounded ethnographer attached to a fixed identity for example male white medical anthropologist.

Thereafter I describe and discuss what it means to be labelled ‘black African Christian woman ethnographer, who is from Masaka in Uganda, registered for a PhD at the London School of

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<sup>3</sup> Fula proverb

Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and conducting fieldwork on sexuality among youths in The Gambia'. Drawing from literature about the insider-outsider dichotomy, ethnographic material and my analytical interpretations, I discuss the strengths and limitations of my person as an instrument of this particular research upon which my thesis is based. I examine the ways in which I constantly negotiated my identity, focusing specifically on the fluidity of my race, gender, social class, literacy, spirituality, sexuality, marital status, reproduction.

### ***Appendix 1.1 My metamorphosis as an ethnographer***

Similar to the explanations of other anthropologists of human sexuality, particularly open homosexuals and sub-Saharan Africans (Bolton 1999, 1992, Ahlberg 1991, 1994, Obbo 1995, Motsemme 2007), my biggest motivation for getting involved with and staying in the study of sexuality was a sense of responsibility to my very own community which was hit early and hard by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. With evidence of *siliimu* disease appearing as early as 1982 (Serwadda et al. 1985), Uganda was one of the first African countries to reach epidemic proportions of HIV-1. Between 1981 and 1986, my country had the highest HIV prevalence and incidence rates in sub-Saharan Africa. Beyond the statistics, I was surrounded left, right and centre; to the north, south, east and west; above and below by deeply ailing beloved relatives, friends, colleagues, community members, fellow countrymen and countrywomen. As a country we had just gone through the throes of death by the gun, guerrillas and grenades. Suddenly, as the pain of burying maimed corpses from war was subsiding, we got a fresh and deeper sorrow of death from an incurable and seemingly mysterious disease. The shared dejection came from helplessly watching and then burying wasted relatives. The statistical numbers stood for loved ones we personally cared for and treated as their bodies battled with and then succumbed to various blows dealt by long-term AIDS-related illnesses. I was perplexed and weary of loving, caring for and then losing loved ones to AIDS. In my earnest desperation to contribute anything (however small) to the understanding of



this ‘new killer disease’ – as it was called then, I entered and have since remained in the academics of human sexuality.

I blossomed from childhood, through adolescence and into womanhood during the rise, peak and plateau of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in my country. Furthermore, I graduated from Makerere University with a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication and Literature (Hons) in the same period. The simultaneous setting of these two rites of passage – one a physical rite marked by social cultural prescriptions and proscriptions for femininity, sexuality, and womanhood; the other an intellectual transition – with the AIDS epidemic perhaps influenced my career path. In my desire and decision to do sexuality research in a meaningful way, I was influenced ‘in part by personal fears about becoming a casualty in this disaster, and in part by intellectual curiosity about the research then beginning to try and understand this grim phenomenon (Bolton 1999:434).

#### **Appendix 1.1.1 Egg: my birth as an ethnographer**

After graduation I was employed in February 1997 to work under the supervision of a medical anthropologist who recently moved to my home district Masaka - a rural field-station of the Medical Research Council Programme on AIDS in Uganda. Unknown to me then, my career-path would be mapped out largely with reference to Robert Pool.

My first job was temporary: as a data entry clerk in an acceptability study of products in which an effective vaginal microbicide could be delivered (Pool et al. 2000, Hart et al. 1999, Green et al. 2001). Although initially employed to key English translations of transcribed texts into the computer, I eventually became supervisor of fieldwork, data processing and entry. As fieldwork stopped, I got involved as the main local researcher in a cross-sectional qualitative study to explore the sexual behaviour of school-going adolescents in rural Uganda (Nyanzi et al. 2001, Kinsman et al. 2000). I was involved in the entire research process, conceiving the study, redefining the research questions, designing instruments, piloting and refining them, contacting the

school administration to seek for permission, conducting data collection with a research team using role plays, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, participant observation and school essay competitions. Alongside this, I was involved in setting up a database with the content of popular soft pornographic magazines available in both rural and urban Uganda (Gysels et al. 2005). I also participated in a qualitative study that explored breastfeeding patterns relevant to the vertical transmission of HIV (Pool et al. 2001a), perceptions of maternity staff to treating or caring for mothers infected with HIV, and what expectant mothers thought about revealing a positive HIV status to maternity staff (Pool et al. 2001b).

The first contact I ever had with a doctorate student conducting ethnography, came in the form of Ann-Maree Nobelius who was co-supervised by Robert Pool. It never ceased to amaze me that she had left Australia to come to rural Uganda to study the sexual behaviour of out-of-school adolescents. I observed her as she rode her motorbike (often with her supplies on the front and her field assistant on the back) to and from the village. For a while, she slept in a two-roomed house near the village-clinic, with only an outside pit latrine. I watched as she negotiated and established relationships with some of the villagers, as well as scientists and policymakers in the urban centre. I noticed how she supervised her fieldwork largely conducted in Luganda – a language totally foreign to her, attended village meetings, grappled with paying for data entry. Ann-Maree's experiences (both successes and failures) as a student from one social cultural setting, attempting to study sexuality of adolescents in another context, were crucial to some of the pragmatic decisions I made concerning my doctorate ethnography.

After a period of strategic advocacy, skilful bargaining and gentle urging, Robert Pool managed to convince the MRC/ UVRI to sponsor me for graduate education at the University College London between September 1999 and June 2000. I registered for the Master of Science degree in Medical Anthropology which was co-organised by Prof. Murray Last and Prof. Roland Littlewood. I learnt some things about British anthropology, but the greatest take home for me was



the need for fieldwork to begin appreciating how diverse subcultures appreciate and interpret health and illness. To implement the theory taught, I conducted fieldwork-based research about lay meanings of Pentecostal healing of HIV/AIDS in south-western Uganda (Nyanzi 2003). Though brief, this was my first ethnographic fieldwork project. I autonomously made all decisions for this project. On graduating, I began referring to myself as a medical anthropologist.

On return to the MRC base in Masaka, I was allowed as a graduate to conceive research ideas, formulate research proposals and follow them through the process of research, until they eventually produced papers published in academic journals and presented at scientific conferences<sup>4</sup>. Together with other colleagues, I designed, implemented and wrote up three main studies which explored the sexual behaviour of market women (Nyanzi et al. 2005a, Nyanzi et al. 2003a), the sexuality and sexual health of public motorbike taxi-riders (Nyanzi et al. 2003b, 2004a, 2005b, 2005c), and sexual encounters within cultural spaces in Buganda society including death rituals, funerals, birthing, ceremonies, twin ceremonies (Nyanzi 2004b, 2008). I also developed and obtained ethical approval for two proposals; one exploring sexual behaviour in the security forces including the army, police, prison guards and private security guards, the other investigating inmates understandings of sexuality and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS. It was my hope that either proposal would form my doctorate studies.

During this formative stage of my career, I realised that I was more inclined towards qualitative research methods. Although I studied some basic statistics, the thrust of my training and work experience equipped me with skills for conceiving, implementing, managing and evaluating qualitative studies. My birth into sexuality research was situated in an era which was quizzing 'African sexuality' in relation to causality of high HIV rates in areas of the continent. Thus the strong link between sexuality and health in my early research. Albeit being housed in a biomedical research institute, with strong emphasis on epidemiology, statistics and virology, my early

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<sup>4</sup> The most notable conferences that acted as first outlets of preliminary results were the series International AIDS Conference (IAC) and International Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections in Africa (ICASA).

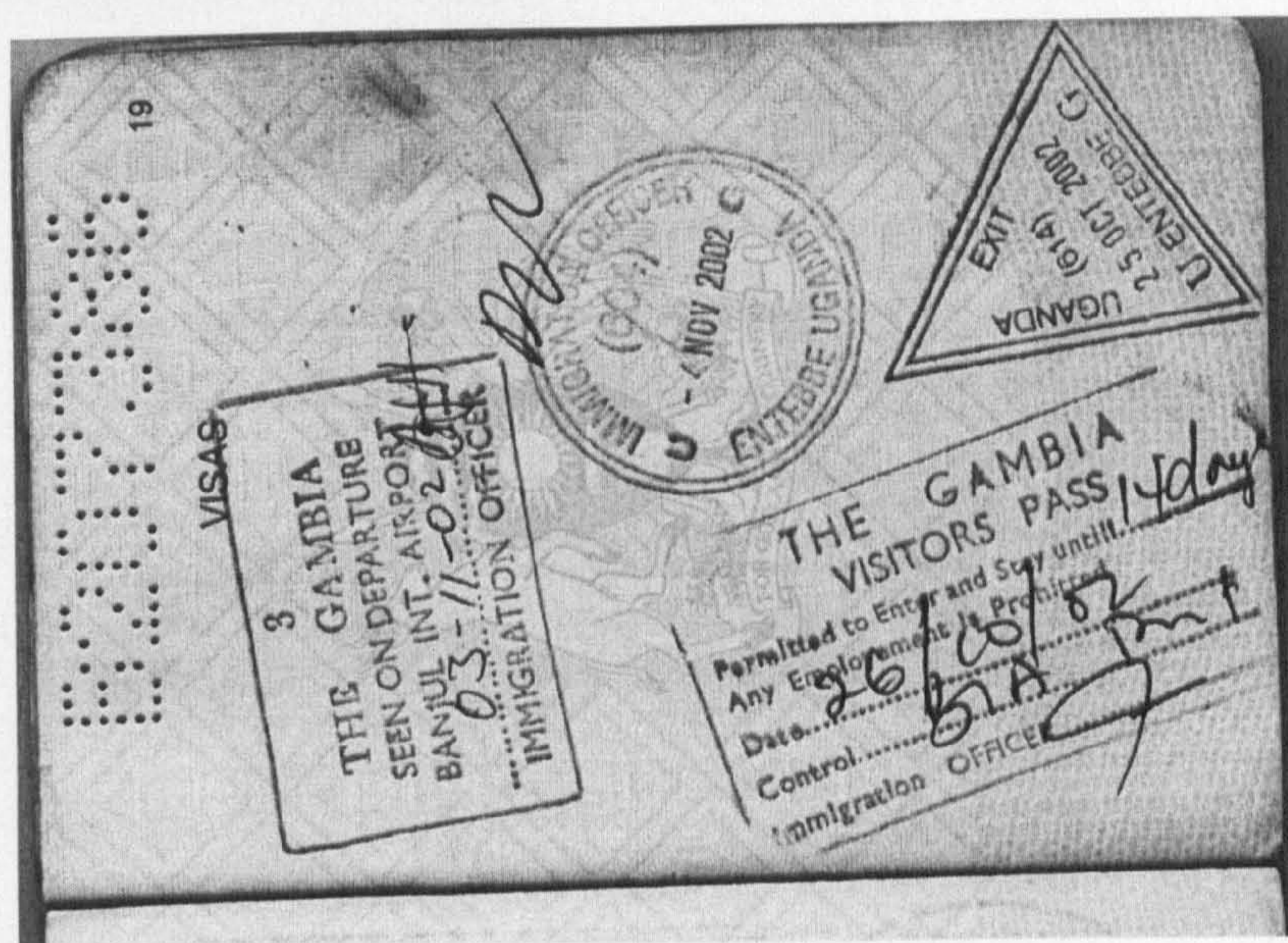


nurturing was as a social scientist working within this environment. I learnt early, that different disciplinary and methodological approaches are all valuable to generating knowledge.

### **Appendix 1.1.2 Larva: 'Welcome to Banjul International Airport' – Round 1**

And then I got an opportunity to transfer to The Gambia. I worked as a 'local anthropologist' – still under the supervision of Robert Pool<sup>5</sup>, on a multi-site study, combining anthropology and health economics, on the demand for prevention and treatment of malaria.

*Figure 1.1 My first Gambian immigration clearance*



I first arrived in The Gambia on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2002. I was based at the Farafenni field-station of the Medical Research Council Laboratories. I had a team of three multi-lingual fulltime salaried fieldworkers and one driver. We did an ethnography of malaria; soaking ourselves in the lives of the rural Gambians in our ten study villages, periodically living in their hamlets, participating in their daily lives, recruiting participants in fourteen rounds of interviews, collecting data, transcribing, translating and entering them into computer.

<sup>5</sup> He had moved earlier on to the Gates Malaria Programme based at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.



Alongside this, I triangulated ethnographic methods and participatory rapid appraisal (PRA) techniques to explore the roles of traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in the villages (Nyanzi et al. 2007a, 2007b).

During this time, I observed interesting dynamics of the sexual behaviour and sexual health of youths in both rural and urban locales. This formed the new basis for my research proposal for doctorate studies sponsored by the Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Programme. I chose the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in order to maintain the apprenticeship under Robert Pool's supervision. I began my studies on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2003.

### **Appendix 1.1.3 Nymph: Doctoral fieldwork**

Perhaps the greatest personal growth, change and self-critique I made in my academic life occurred within this stage of my ethnographer's metamorphosis. Removed from the protective cocoon of academia (during fieldwork), and no longer affiliated to the dauntingly prestigious foreign-fuelled Medical Research Council Laboratories (with all its structural, material and scientific provisioning), I stood bare before my study participants. This time in the field, I was stripped of all the powerful symbols of scientific authority which I had previously hidden under. Without any institutional protections, I came to a place of getting in touch with myself: who I thought I was, who I really was, and which of these I presented in my daily field interactions.

After years of working as part of larger research establishments – often on studies conceived by other principal investigators who had sought for the funding and had their own stamp(s) of ownership of the idea, - it was an exciting challenge for me to savour and then possess autonomous ownership of my doctoral research idea, process and outcome. Not only was the experience thoroughly empowering, it also brought an immense charge of responsibility with it. Suddenly, I had the sole and ultimate responsibility as designer of the study; fundraiser for each aspect ranging from registration and tuition fees at LSHTM, buying recorders, kola nuts, bicycle

pumps, paying salaries of research assistants, paying for visas, alien registration and air tickets; manager of the research process, research targets, in puts and outputs; chief accountant of the resources including man hours, calendar time, research funds; coordinator of the complementary phases such as the library research, fieldwork in different locations, university observances of procedure for research degree students, producing out-puts in journals and at conferences, supervisory interactions; main negotiator of the ethics, science, and practical application of the study. As an ethnographer, the task to continuously question, research, understand, respond, apply, make links, etc, fell squarely on my shoulders. Even the final responsibility for possible flaws in the arguments and logic presented in the thesis is mine, although the work is dependent on the input of several actors.

No longer in the cradle of the North, I applied my mind to critical thought. Even though registered in a university located in the northern hemisphere, my network interactions with Africanist institutions namely Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and African Gender Institute (AGI), opened my eyes to the urgent need to purge my academic reflection of neo-colonial blue prints as well as mass regurgitation of patriarchal templates. A departure from my earlier scholarship, during my doctoral ethnography, I established within myself that I was principally Africanist and Feminist. This transformation meant that rather than consuming and replicating all 'received knowledge' (Olukoshi 2004)<sup>6</sup> about the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, I became sold out to offering re-definitions of context specific phenomena in a critical, participatory and reflexive way.

When I started out, the PhD ethnography was merely one project – totally isolated from me. However with the passing of time (days, weeks, months, years...), the whooshing past of deadlines and negotiating of benchmarks, I poured more and more of myself into the study; so much so that the divide between me and the study became blurred. Today (when there is nothing

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<sup>6</sup> Spoken during an opening session of a Methodological Workshop for the Social Sciences and HIV/AIDS Network.



more of myself to pour into the PhD), I am certain I reached a point of coalescence between my person and my doctoral studies.

#### **Appendix 1.1.4 Adult cockroach: writing the ethnography**

*'Like many things in British academia, no one teaches how to write.'* Nick Black, 2006<sup>7</sup>

*'For the anthropologist the thesis also represents a "rite de passage" where one cuts oneself from the rest of the world, and lets nothing interfere with the writing.'*

Gamble (2002)

I began analysing my field data as soon as I started writing my field-notes. As I described my field experiences in writing, reflected over each encounter with a study participant, thought through each event I attended, cross examined both mundane and unique activities I witnessed in different interactions with diverse people, thought about the varied scenarios in a range of spaces where youths and other relevant adults or children congregated, I was simultaneously digesting and re-examining the deeper meanings and nuances embedded within these social interactions. This early and continued analysis and thinking through of the fieldwork experiences, which formed the basis of my ethnographic data, became more organised thematically and scientifically when I wrote it up into publishable pieces. In response to the sequential outflow from the research methodology chosen (see chapter 2), data generated within the study often converged around specific main themes. After reaching a point of saturation about one aspect I began to analytically write up pieces of varying lengths, publishing and broadcasting them in a range of forums including academic peer reviewed journals, regional and international academic conferences and other scientific spaces. The presentation of my preliminary results encouraged and invited the engagement of other scholars and commentators with my research findings. My dialogues in these diverse spaces steered me early on in the research to start and maintain the practice of writing up

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<sup>7</sup> Editor of Journal of Health Services Research and Policy, during a lecture 'How to write a paper' presented at a Workshop on Publication, Social Science and Public Health, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

the results in publishable format, and re-writing them after working through the critiques and feedback generated. This process refined my thinking into coherency. It also opened my eyes to other relevant issues to investigate while still in the field.

Writing the ethnography was a grooming and growing experience for me, a pedagogical exercise where my anthropological skills and expertise were sharpened. It was a transforming activity where I moved beyond writing about the Gambian youths whom I set out to study, to finding myself as an individual, a woman, an African, a scholar, and certainly an ethnographer. The entire ethnographic experience – both the fieldwork and writing up of this text – was illuminating to me, not only about the peoples I set out to study but also about my person as a researcher in interaction with others (Ezzy 2002).

Verifying the arguments of other anthropologists (including Geertz 1975, 1988, Hammersley 1998, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Clifford 1986, Abu-Lughod 1991, Ebron 2001, Ezzy 2002), it was in the course of writing this ethnography that I confirmed that data are never sitting out there in the field, waiting to be collected by the expert researcher from the inexperienced. Rather I began to make sense of the data garnered as I wrote up. On initial contact with specific relevant social phenomena, it was not clear what I wanted to write about them until I started writing. This resultant text was created as I wrote, rewrote and reflected upon the data that emerged during my repeated interactions with different players in the field. The data were created in this process. The text was created along the way. The ethnography was a process; like a child growing from one level of infancy through diverse stages until maturity. Writing matured the ethnographic text as pounded sorghum matures fermented brew.

At the outset it is important that I present the significance of the issue of selectivity to the writing stage. Not everything that I saw is included in this text. Not all the data that emerged have been analysed. It was crucial that I exercise selectivity; that I prioritised what thematic findings to focus on in the thesis. I made informed choices about what to leave out. Working with my



supervisor's advice, other important results emerging out of the data, would come later in publications subsequent to the thesis.

Another issue that I grappled with as I wrote up this ethnography, revolved around my authorial authority to write about a people supposedly differently from me (see also Madge 2004). Who was I – a Ugandan from Masaka – to write about Gambians? What right did I have to make pronouncements about their way of life? How dared I – an initially asexual Born-Again Christian – write about the sexual lives and meanings of sexuality among these predominantly Muslim youths? I found myself constantly battling off inner voices questioning my right to write this ethnography, particularly considering the position from which I was. Self-validation was a constant source of discomfort as I wrote. Though mostly invisible, my inner battles were brought to the fore once when Gambian 'experts' touched this soft spot by publicly and audibly querying the same. Ultimately, it was my presence in the field that gave me boldness and courage to keep writing and publishing the results (see also Hammersley 1990).

### ***Appendix 1.2 Locating myself: two genealogies***

*'It was however, not of primary importance that the history of Africa should necessarily be written by Africans themselves; moreover most of the African authors and scholars who were involved in the project had received their education and training abroad, in a European or American tradition. Nevertheless, an effort has evidently been made to find contributors with an African background since it was presumed that an African scholar would have unique abilities to understand, analyse and evaluate his own culture...'*

Adahl (1995:9)<sup>8</sup>

Similar to other African anthropologists, I trained in western universities. In fact I was mentored by a European anthropologist: all male, white, middleclass. Should I thus cower away, bury my face with shame, and apologise for this highly suspicious western influence? Am I therefore a

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<sup>8</sup> See also Brett (1978).

Eurocentric, neo-colonised, brainwashed Judas, who cannot be Africanist but is some hybrid thing? Does this mean I am relatively more empowered with all the access to western libraries, high technology learning, and education that fosters critical thought? Am I therefore necessarily any less or any better than African anthropologists trained and nurtured by African mentors in African universities?

### **Appendix 1.2.1 And Robert Pool produced an egg**

When asked to list my top three mentors<sup>9</sup>, I instantly replied, 'Robert Pool, Mahatma Gandhi, and Miria Matembe'. My humble pronouncement of Robert Pool as 'my father in the discipline' is validated in more ways than one. Although he never lectured me about social anthropology, I learnt from him by induction.

Anthropology is absent from the university courses offered at undergraduate or post-graduate study in Uganda. Ugandan anthropologists including Okot P'Bitek (1931-1982), Christine Obbo, Stella Neema, Lilliane Mpabulungi, all studied abroad, mainly in European or North American universities. Discussing the development of anthropology as a discipline in sub-Saharan Africa, (Sall 2003) stresses the post colonial suspicions levelled against pre-independence anthropologists who were spies, informers and instigators of the colonisers. In an idealistic spirit of nationalism, several sub-Saharan African countries shut down total faculties and departments of anthropology in the largely public universities and tertiary institutes<sup>10</sup>. Therefore given my social-spatial location (-i.e. who I am, where I studied, what I had access to), in relation to the national, ideological, structural and sectoral provisions for tertiary education, *ceteris paribus* there was no logical way for me to enter into anthropology.

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<sup>9</sup> April 2002, during selection interviews for fellowship recipients of the Ford Foundation International Fellowship Programme.

<sup>10</sup> Makerere University was a college of Medicine during the East African Community (EAC) arrangement. The break up of the EAC led to national universities diversifying. But it was too late for anthropology in Uganda. It has just never taken off as a study discipline offered to students.



In fact when Robert Pool was first mentioned to me, even though I had a BA already, I thought he was working with anthropods. The word resembles anthropology. In preparation for my first meeting with him, I spent a weekend reading about anthropods.

After the salutations, I asked him, 'What disease do you treat?'

'I am not a medical doctor,' he replied.

'Oh, I thought you were addressed as Dr Pool in my invitation letter,' I stammered, scared I was creating a bad first impression.

'No. I am not that kind of doctor,' he said again.

Confused, I asked, 'So what kind of a doctor are you?'

'A book doctor<sup>11</sup>,' he replied.

I was very puzzled. I had never appreciated a 'Dr of books' until that moment. Of course, a lot of my lecturers at university had had titles such as Dr and Prof., but my perception of them had not stretched wide enough to link their studies, and qualifications to the titles!

In many ways, Pool found an empty slate on which he has dubbed diverse shades of paint; some thick and deep, others thin and subtle. On the whole, my apprenticeship as an ethnographer under the supervision of a master medical anthropologist has been like the journey of an eagle: from a tiny fragile egg, through a stumbling featherless eaglet, to an adult eagle. Robert Pool took me under his wings, taught me to fly and then allowed me to spread my wings and fly, fly, fly...

This mentorship relationship impacted my formation as a scholar in five specific ways:

1. I chose to conduct 'proper traditional fieldwork' in a community other than my own because I judged the merits of this tradition after observing Pool in the field. I weighed how this impacted upon his systematic approach to knowledge generation with emphasis on emic positions. Furthermore, on reading his earlier ethnographies (Pool 1994, 2000), studies born out of his participant observation, I prized the benefits of this approach to unpacking and understanding

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Pool's comment: 'I think I probably said "a doctor of books," in quotation marks, quoting the way villagers in Cameroon saw me.'

complex context-specific phenomena. Having been in the field, Pool offered me practical counsel when I bombarded him with puzzling questions about negotiating confusing terrain in the field.

2. I was fortified through my grooming by Pool, as a social scientist given to 'soft science' in a tough multi-disciplinary environment of the MRC Programme on AIDS/ Uganda Virus Research Institute – where statistics, epidemiology, biomedicine, numeric expression and churning out publications, were the established ruling scientific hegemony. I witnessed this institutionalised marginalisation of qualitative approaches to science repeated at the MRC Laboratories in The Gambia, as well as at the LSHTM. And I observed Pool stand tall as a qualitative researcher in this scientific empire. Watching him (sometimes close by, sometimes at a distance) determinedly going about his work, in these multidisciplinary environments, experientially validated for me that it is okay to be different. Under his mentorship, different approaches to knowledge production often complemented or supplemented each other.

3. I came to value that even participant observation had a valid contribution to make to questions of health. He never battled with jargon and argument to prove the worth of 'soft science'. He let his work speak for him. And so I learnt from Pool to take pride in the social sciences, contrary to the national indoctrination of my generation of Ugandan scholars who were brainwashed to believe that hard sciences came first, and then law and the humanities and then social sciences. According to propaganda in Uganda, the 'softer' one's science meant the less intelligent, the shallower their academic excellence, and the less valuable their practical application to effecting national development.

4. I also learnt from Pool to consider pragmatic innovative combinations of theory and methods, in order to generate powerful ways to understand or explain social phenomena. I learnt from him that it is okay, even chic to be unconventional in research approach – the main issue being finding methodologies that better unpack particular questions in a specific context.



5. Perhaps the greatest contribution of Pool's mentoring is with regard to how I yearn to write ethnography in a manner accessible beyond the discipline of anthropology. Half of ethnography is fieldwork. The other half is the written product (Spradley 1980).

'If you cannot say something simply, then don't say it,' Pool once said to me after reading one of my draft chapters. His tone revealed he was obviously irritated by my attempt at high-sounding academia. Fuelled by the insecurity of needing to impress peers, professors and publishers, I occasionally produced a turgid draft packed with clanging technical jargon (which I probably never understood). Pool's immediate and constant reply to such gobbledygook was, 'Go back to your desk. Digest what you need to say. Rewrite that simply.'

### **Appendix 1.2.2 I ooze in and out of identities – All of me**

*'I am that I am!' Exodus 3:14*

I often shift between attitudes of intense jealousy, fiery outrage, cool sympathy and deep incredulity towards academics who present themselves as being neatly bounded into a particular category (or a set combination of categories). Their smugness and confidence about who they are justifies the Western obsession with neat classificatory schemas, and sometimes makes me wonder whether I am forever the exotic 'Other'. But like Fanon (1952) predicted, 'the Other has changed places with the Self'. Once the focus of the gaze of western anthropologists, some Africans are now professional anthropologists (also called native anthropologists, or halfies<sup>12</sup>). I follow directly in their footsteps. And yet unlike earlier ethnographers who present as though they certainly had one consistent identity typified by the label 'outsider', I find that I repeatedly traversed these boundaries. I find more and more that I am flexible. I flow (mostly) with ease into diverse forms – all me.

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<sup>12</sup> Abu-Lughod (1991:137) defines halfies as 'people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage'.

Physically I am all Woman. However I am also male in two distinct ways. I am the first child of the first son of the first son of an only child. I have had to play the role of a son, ever since my parents separated probably because my mother 'produced only daughters'. In his pursuit for a woman to bear him sons, my father got three other established wives. Ever since I started employment, I took on the bulk of my father's gender roles as breadwinner, provider of school fees for my siblings, domestic bills for the house, decision maker, and sole family investor. I am my mother's 'right-hand man'. It was as though I married my mother and also adopted my sisters as my children. I am also the daughter of my mother, a self-declared 'more masculine than ten foolish men put together'. '*Ndi omu mu basajja abasirusiru kkumi.*'

As an ethnographer attempting to discuss matters surrounding the sexuality of youths in The Gambia, my Christian religion variously presented obstacles (for detailed examination refer to chapter 5 which discusses the eminence of Islam in most aspects of Gambian life). Four key transformative processes facilitated me with more leeway to originally closed off Islamicised spheres of social cultural and political life; namely my marriage to a Muslim Gambian – Ousman my first translator and permanent research partner, my public rite of conversion into Islam under the guidance of a renowned *marabout*, joining with *Mourides* for the annual pilgrimage to Touba in honour of Serigne Touba Mbacke, and the physical birth of a daughter into a staunch Muslim family.

I do not pretend to have become an Islamic convert based on understanding of the Qu'ran, or the Hadith or even Islamic ethos prevalent in my study area<sup>13</sup>. This was impossible to

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<sup>13</sup> For critiques of my performances at Islamic lifestyle while I was in the field, my simple rebuttal of deception: in addition to conducting participant observation in a predominantly Muslim country, I am also a Muslim wife, bore Muslim children, have a whole big extended Muslim family. The ethnographer, the wife, the mother, the daughter-in-law, the sister-in-law, the aunt are all one person. My private life (if ever there was one) was very much integrated with my ethnographic life. I cannot make any firm distinctions between the two. Thus it deeply puzzles me when other scholars can indeed tease apart when my Islamic life was 'deceptive for purposes of research', and when it was genuine as my marital faith. In '*Visas, marriage certificates and bank statements: exchange in sexual relationships between Gambian youths and Westerners*' we examine how it is normalised part of life for non-Muslim women to 'convert into Islam' as a prerequisite for marrying Muslim men in the study context. Markowitz and Ashkenazi's



accomplish within the life-span of my doctorate research particularly because I do not understand or speak Arabic – the language of the Qu’ran. Considering the time restrictions of my doctorate ethnography, I can boldly state that though I attempted to the best of my knowledge and abilities to learn the Islamic way of life (as prescribed in The Gambia), I could only go so far. My body was converted through ritual baths, recitations of scriptures, prayers, the public rite of conversion, acceptance into the Islamic faith through the confirmation of my Islamic ethnographic name – Aminata Bah, and registration of my marriage by the Chief Khadhi. For example I adopted the veil particularly when in the mosque, during pilgrimage, or at times of *swallah* prayers, etc. I tried to live the practice of Islam as I watched other women live; of course I blundered here and there, but always learning from my mistakes and getting better.

Elsewhere (Jassey and Nyanzi 2007:9-10), I describe and examine my sexual journey, focussing on the role of fear arising out of local associations of sexual activity with the real possibilities for infection with HIV, the resultant progression to incurable AIDS and a painful death, or the shame of having an unwanted pregnancy, considerations of abortion, etc. It is important that scholars of sexualities are able to engage with their own sexuality.

*‘In an important sense anthropology’s long fascination and capacity to understand the sexual other ultimately depends on anthropologists’ willingness to engage in self-examination: How can ethnographers expect to inquire about the sexuality of the self and the other, increasingly a central task, if they do not have the courage to confront their own?’* Climo (1999:43)

Briefly, for the first two years of my time in The Gambia I was single, sexually unattached to any man, and abstaining from sexual activity. However in the course of fieldwork, I grew to love, and later married my translator, Ousman Bah, and on November 11, 2004, I bore a daughter. It was the

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(1999) edited volume tackles how other anthropologists handle the issue of compartmentalising their lives: this is the field worker, this is the father, this is the husband. ‘Aren’t we always all these?’ the various authors emphasise.

second year of my doctorate studies. Two years later, I bore him twin sons on April 20, 2007. I was finalising my thesis. Similar to a select few other anthropologists (for example Lunsing 1999, Jones 1999, Poewe 1999, Newton 1996, Cesara 1982) my personal sexual journey intersects in places with components of my academic ethnographic enterprise into understanding the sexual lives of those I gazed upon.

### ***Appendix 1.3 Negotiating self and fieldwork***

At the start of my fieldwork, I was totally mortified after a month of visiting the offices of key gatekeepers for my research. These included government officials of the Department of State for Health and Social Welfare (DOSHSW), Division Health Team (DHT) members in the North Bank Division, reproductive health programme workers, youth organisation employees, secondary school teachers, and some village elders. I felt very frustrated. I still remember my fears caused by the looming possibility of failure to negotiate permission to conduct my ethnography. I penned in my journal a summary of my perception of their reception of me.

**‘Return to your home, get married and make babies.’ Field-notes January 2004**

I met covert resistance from several fronts. Apparently, a lone black woman of single marital status is a bad woman (see also Nnaemeka 1998, Obbo 1986). If she proposed to conduct long intensive fieldwork on her own, living in the villages or in a town suburb in order to participate in the lives of the community, she was highly suspect. Further revelation that she planned to ask about sex, sexuality and behaviour, confirmed she lived in a different realm.

Like a suspect under interrogation, I found myself receiving endless questions: Did you say you are not married? So who will you be staying with? Who will pay your bills? But, are you sure you want to spend three years doing this instead of getting married? Apart from English what other languages do you speak? No Wollof? But you are going to Farafenni? Do you have malaria in your



country? But how will you get the youths to talk to you? Did you say you are a student? What about your learning if you are going to be living here? Aren't you with the MRC? So who is funding your studies? Are you a doctor? You don't know how to pray? How will you live in the villages? You want a male research assistant? But you are not married, so how will you live with him? Who will be your assistant? Where will you get participants? Who said we have AIDS in this country? Why don't you change your focus to malaria? Where are your questionnaires? On and on the questions ran.

Nothing really prepared me for this interrogation of self, by the study participants, and consequently by myself. Even with all my prior fieldwork experiences, I had not anticipated this interlocking of gazes established in the field. I was crudely awoken to the practicalities of the politics of self-representation in the field. Ashkenazi and Markowitz (1999) discuss another student who experienced similar circumstances while in the field.

### **Appendix 1.3.1 My sex, my skin, my shame**

After about four hours of a bumpy ride in a *gelegele*<sup>14</sup> I invited my three research assistants for *tangana*<sup>15</sup> – a frothy concoction of Nescafe powder, condensed milk imported from Holland, plenty of sugar and hot water stored in flower-patterned flasks kept under roughshod wooden tables, set up with wooden benches on the side of the road. My favourite *tangana* joint in Farafenni trading centre was opposite GAMTEL public phone-house, the only supermarket and Edi's Bar and Hotel. *Tangana* – which I preferred to call 'Coffee-by-the-road', was one of my best fieldwork rituals. Not only had I met and made friends while we loudly sipped coffee and dug our teeth into roast mutton, or fried beef, or boiled egg, or potato-and-butter sandwiches, I had also tapped into some level of local gossip (often mediated by translators), practised my vocabulary skills, talked about myself and my mission to the area, held several debriefing meetings, or planning sessions

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<sup>14</sup> Commonly crudely translated into English as 'bush-taxi'.

<sup>15</sup> *Tangana* is the Wollof word for hot.

with my team, directed friends and study participants to meet me there for appointments, and of course also observed the nightlife in Farafenni. Besides, it was a practical solution to feeding cheaply without the added burdens of cooking or washing up.

On this particular occasion, the two male research assistants enthusiastically and immediately accepted my invitation. After some silence, the lady who was also new to the team, declined.

‘Why aren’t you coming?’ I asked her. ‘We could all go home first, wash up, rest a while and meet up later.’

‘No,’ she replied. ‘I am a married woman. I cannot take that *tangana* sold on the roadside. If I want coffee, I make it at my home. A proper woman does not sit at the road, eating at night. That is a thing for men.’

‘Oh. Okay. Then we’ll see you tomorrow,’ I replied.

I was not only amazed, but also stunned by this late revelation of gender differentiation in what had seemed like neutral social space to me.

During the previous three years of fieldwork, drinking *tangana* had become one of my favourite fieldwork rituals. With hindsight, I realise it was predominantly a male social space, particularly in areas away from the urban capital of Banjul and the touristy coastal areas. On reflection, I now realise the only females I ever shared *tangana* with were either Gambian researchers or politicians ‘on trek to the rural areas’ and thus removed from their homes, or other foreigners either visiting or based in Farafenni, or otherwise sojourners en route – either waiting for the ferry or a *gelegele* to transport us. However in the context of Farafenni, or indeed the rural areas, women do not generally consume *tangana*. It is a man’s prerogative. Was I thus perceived as a man? As an outsider, was it okay or excusable or even acceptable to penetrate and participate in male spaces? Had I been ruffling male feathers through my ignorance? Did that make me masculine in local perceptions? Or was I perhaps ‘an improper woman’? Would they have



classified me as a woman-man, in contrast to '*gor-jigen*<sup>16</sup>' (meaning man-woman)? Is it possible I came across as a potential *chagga*<sup>17</sup> by publicly consuming *tangana* together with the men-folk of Farafenni? Was I excused for breaking this gendered customary practice of eating out at night, the minute my mouth opened and I was recognised as foreigner? What licensed my penetration of these male spaces? Was it my ignorance, my arrogance, my difference, their tolerance, or their perception of my harmlessness? What other social spaces or functions, or attributes was I a part of, which were ascribed male territory within the context of my fieldwork?

In 'My gender transgressions during fieldwork' (Nyanzi (in preparation)), I discuss how diverse community members communicated with me about how it was socially unbecoming for me – an assumed 'proper African woman' – to live alone and on my own particularly in the urban areas, to be unmarried without validated publicly known reasons, to hold out my hand in salutation or farewell to a man, to answer back or question or challenge men particularly if I did so loudly or publicly and if they were older than me, to go to the graveside during burial even when it was close friends or family who had died, to sit either in or at the village *bantabas* gossiping away with the men-folk, to touch *jujus* on the body of a man, to try and cut a man wearing protective *jujus*, to go hunting for hares or bush-pigs in the night, or to hang out with customary gun-powder blasters when they were celebrating ceremonies with the loud bang of gunshots. Many times, the participants were perhaps hoping to shame me, when they cautioned me about my gender transgressions. And yet I was also quite shameless in my consumption and enjoyment of these male activities. For example the elderly women were really worried and fretted about my enjoyment of the company of the gunmen during celebrations. They explained that when an unmarried woman was within seeing distance of these gunmen, she would never be able to conceive. Even if she did, her womb would never be able to carry a baby to term. Sometimes the

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<sup>16</sup> *Gor-jigen* meaning man-woman is a local Wollof label whose meaning is ambivalent: weak men, homosexuals, feminine men, etc. See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>17</sup> Local label for commercial sex workers.

worry on their faces was so real that I once got scared into keeping away for a while. However, curiosity often got the best of me, leading me back to the gunmen's shelter during the few ceremonial events I attended simultaneously with them.

Albeit the allowances for several gender transgressions, there were also spaces that were forever closed to me because of the female body I carry. Traditions and conventions and custom and religion enjoined that these were a male-only terrain. A distinct example is the front rows of the mosques which are blocked off and reserved only for men.

The body I inhabit – a black female body – meant that I could very easily slip unnoticed into socially designated female spaces, and join other women and girls as they went about their ordinary activities. Although all Woman, I was not always comfortable with the roles, postures, expectations and limitations that were socially and culturally ascribed to me because of my gender. And indeed my body gave me access to individuals, social spaces, circumstances, research questions, and negotiation skills which many earlier ethnographers of The Gambia could not be admitted to simply because they (for example David Gamble, Shipton, Stephen Thompson, David Ames, Neil Weir, etc) were mostly male, white, middle class; or otherwise they were female BUT white (including Caroline Bledsoe, Katie Paine, Tonne Sommerfelt, Ulla Wagner, Linda Salmon, Susan Beckerleg, Clare Madge, etc).

Similar to Paula Ebron (2002) who conducted her ethnographic fieldwork about Mande praise-singers in The Gambia, I am black and I am woman. Therefore there are some similarities in our field experiences. However unlike her, I am African where she is African-American. Does this distinction matter to my ethnography? What does skin-colour or nationality have to do with my research? Does it make any difference, as long as the researcher is skilful and has the expertise to do the job well? I did not question these issues until they hit me full force in the field.

Though an African, and totally unashamed of my African-ness, some of my field experiences made me squirm at my geographical location. With the exception of my reactions to



moving films or novels or written biographic accounts of slave trade, colonial experiences, apartheid or genocide, my African-ness had never been tested before. Prior to my doctorate ethnography, my sentiments about skin-colour were always reserved for other peoples in other spaces and other times than mine. My reflections about the power of skin-colours were entirely either scholarly academic essays, abstract theorizations, or creative fiction. Nothing personal. In the field I learnt that people asked questions about my legitimacy to do ethnography, my authority to ask questions that people coloured differently normally asked, how I dared cross into a terrain they had written off as NOT belonging to black Africans.

During my first village meetings, the early interrogation by key gatekeepers about my mission and proposed study seemed to often touch base with my skin colour.

After two visits and explanations about why I was requesting a hut in one of the compounds in his hamlet, Bouba Ceesay – the *Alkalo* of Samba Soto raised the issue of *Toubabs* doing ethnography. Ousman, who had been translating the conversation between Bouba, and myself suddenly broke into uninterrupted dialogue in Wolof for a few minutes. Not sure what was going on, I gave them some time and then asked what they were discussing.

“He is telling me that he really does not understand why you are trying to do your research like this.”

“Like how?” I asked. And then Bouba spoke to Ousman who continued translating between us.

“I have heard of *Toubabs* who come to villages in The Gambia to live with people in order to learn their ways. Not Africans. It is *Toubabs* who do research.”

“Not really. What about all those Gambian men and women who work in MRC? Aren’t they *Toubabs*?” I replied.

“Yes that is true. But they do not lead the research. They just work for *Toubabs* who pay them. The *Toubabs* are in Fajara and maybe some of them are in the hospital there in Farafenni. But they

do not come to be with us here in the villages. Maybe sometimes they visit us when they are starting a new project.”

“Okay, but then there are all the Nigerian and Ghanaian doctors who come to Gambia to do research. Surely those are not *Toubabs*. They are Africans like you and me.”

“But you see, those people from Nigeria and Ghana... those ones you are saying, they do not come to stay in the villages for many days. They do not sleep in our huts. They do not go to our ceremonies or do the daily activities we do. Some even refuse our local names that we give them. But the *Toubabs*, do this. And you can see them even carrying their babies on the back, wrapped in African cloth.”

Back and forth such interactions would go. Initially I would get offended, even angry, that black Africans were questioning another African’s right to conduct ethnography in their land. Anthropologists (Ryang 2005, Halstead 2001, Narayan 1993) discuss the complexity of doing ethnographic fieldwork as native anthropologists or ‘halfies’. In situations similar to the above interaction with *Alkalo* Bouba Ceesay, I felt that study participants were indeed trying to establish whether or not I – a non-*Toubab* – had any right to adopt this research method. I hated having to repeatedly prove my right to ethnography! I was often inwardly infuriated that ethnography was perceived in my study area as a preserve for particular skin-coloured people and not others.

And anyway, why shouldn’t study participants imagine that ethnography legitimately belongs to *Toubabs*? After all, in the history and development of ethnography as the foundation for anthropology, ethnographers of African peoples were mainly white, male, middle-class. Furthermore, ethnography was initially about scholars from the ‘developed’ worlds coming down to study ‘primitive savages from traditional societies’. Abu-Lughod (1991:138) ably captures traditional anthropology as a ‘... discipline built on the historically constructed divide between the West and non-West. It has been and continues to be primarily the study of the non-West other by the Western self... And the relationship between the West and the non-West, at least since the



birth of anthropology, has been constituted by Western domination.' Thus, it was perhaps inevitable that contemporary members of these former primitive societies would forever perceive ethnography as a method of 'the *Toubabs* studying black African ways'. I often wondered how much longer the systems of formal graduate education in Africa generally, but Uganda in particular, would evade the issue of introducing or harnessing anthropology as a faculty discipline to be passed down onto younger Africans: so that there are some more black African ethnographers doing ethnography in Africa. When would this strangeness of an African ethnographer end?

### **Appendix 1.3.2 Constant negotiations**

Thumbing through my photographs taken during fieldwork, portrays some of the different ways in which I physically presented myself while in the field. Even with costume, posture, and accessories, I was often performing particular aspects of my self; which aspects I hoped would make me fit better within specific contexts. With the passing of time, I had developed wardrobes for particular situations. So skilful did I become at these outward performances, that it became impossible for non-informed people to pick me out by merely looking at physical presentation of the bodies in the different research settings. This helped me go about my work, without standing out obviously as an outsider on a mission to learn the ways of the natives.

### **Appendix 1.3.3 Occupying third space: my in-betweenness**

*'...the quest for 'accurate representations' of other cultures and the other is the stubborn idea that only insiders can produce such representations. ... it takes the form of: only Africans can study Africa, only gay anthropologists can study homosexuality, only women can study issues relating to women, etc.'* Pool (1994:236)

The ensuing chapters illustrate several examples of my constant negotiations of self-presentation which I played out by jumping between the insider-outsider extremes. Katz (1992) encourages intellectuals to find common ground with the other, from which to engage with possibilities of change. Her notion of 'in betweenness' embraces the complexities of negotiating the boundaries of being an intellectual interested in post-colonial geography who intends to effect change. She suggests that it is important to 'position ourselves between description and analysis; between here and there; between the present, past and future; between subject positions; between discourses; between us and them; between the exotic and the mundane; between the unique and the general'. Moss (2004:104) develops this further: 'no positioning is to be advantaged; no positioning, static; no positioning, immune from deconstruction for it is only in these borders that intellectuals can be engaged in attempts at transforming multiple forms of exploitation, dominance, and oppression.' In a similar vein Routledge (1996) develops the concept of 'third space' in which subjects interact in a new hybrid place, purged of the underlying dualisms that constitute subjects as dominant or dominated. Finding and then acting in this space permits relations to be resisted and challenges so that power itself can be reconfigured.

Again, Katz (1994) argues for understanding the ethnographic act as one of 'in betweenness,' rejecting the privilege of any particular positioning, especially that of the researcher. England (1994, 2002) too, argues that there is no omnipotent expert in control of the research process, nor is there a strict dichotomous definition of the researcher and those involved in the research process. Her point is that not only are subject positions under scrutiny, but so are the interactions of the people themselves. What these interactions show is that no one, not even the researcher, has a fixed, static, or easily recognizable subject position.

Valentine (2002) illustrates the difficulty in positioning oneself as a researcher in interview interactions. She shows that different people find different commonalities with the researcher and often shift within the context of one interview setting and that may or may not be accurate.



According to Pool (1994:20), 'the relations of power are not as straightforward as they may seem. It is usually assumed that the anthropologist, as a representative of Western culture, is in a position of power vis-à-vis the members of the society he is studying. But the exercise of power is usually two way. I had money and status and could intrude on people and ask them questions if I wanted, but if they wanted to fool around and amuse themselves (perhaps in collusion with Lawrence) by telling me cock-and-bull stories about cannibals causing kwashiorkor I would not even have noticed.' (See also Fuller 1999, Doyle 1999, Roberts 2000, Roberts 1981, Lather 1988, Wasserfall 1993, Gottfried 1996, Sandoval 2000).

In line with my constant shifts along the insider-outsider continuum as I studied youth sexualities in The Gambia, my style of writing the different chapters in this thesis varies from autobiographic drawn from my personal experiences with the participants' daily lives, to the ethnographic focussing on describing them, to prose analysing the more structured qualitative data, to some presentations or interrogations of literature. This obvious experimentation with many genres of writing is perhaps also a reflection of the different types of data generated from the diverse stances I took as either outsider, or insider or both.

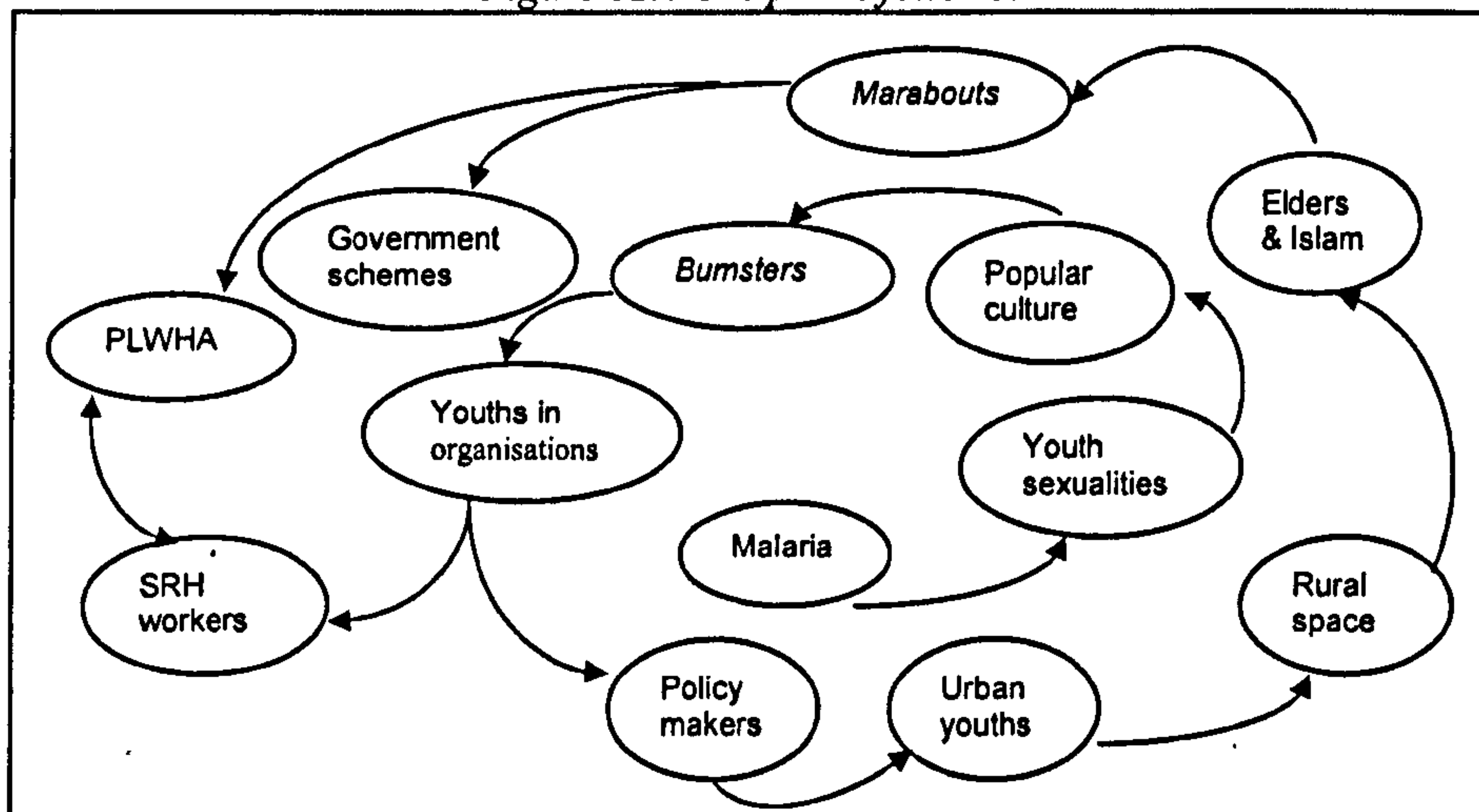
#### **Appendix 1.3.4 One day I'll have my eggs**

After I defend and publish this ethnography, my dream will only have begun. As I was mentored into ethnography, I will one day empower others to become ethnographers.

## Appendix 12: Charting my ethnographic cycle – questions from questions

*Perhaps qualitative studies do not have endings, only questions. (Wolcott 1994b)*

Figure 12.1 The path I followed



My research focus on sexualities of youths meandered through a number of analytical categories in response to findings in the field. Each research cycle opened up a chain of new research questions which needed answering in order to gain a better nuanced understanding of the main research problem. During the period I was in the field, I investigated diverse angles of the youth sexualities' questions – each related to the preceding and subsequent ones.

### *The starting point: malaria*

During my first year in The Gambia (see appendix 11), I worked with a team of three fieldworkers and a driver, studying malaria<sup>1</sup> around Farafenni. During this study, I observed interesting dynamics of sexuality, including sexual norms and values, sexual behaviour, related official discourse and service delivery. I was intrigued by the inherent contradictions that

<sup>1</sup> We conducted a minimum of fourteen rounds of different question routes with each participant.



compounded the complexity of understanding the inter-relatedness of diverse phenomenon. This pushed me to question some previous assumptions based on received knowledge I had about the 'sexual lives of sub-Saharan Africans'.

### *Sexualities in The Gambia: focussing on youths*

At the outset, I wanted my doctorate study to explore meaning(s) of sexuality among youths in The Gambia. Thus I developed five research themes (see appendix 1) around which I generated exploratory research questions (see appendix 2) that formed the research proposal I presented to the LSHTM ethics committee, and to my advisory committee in order to get approval to go the field in December 2003<sup>2</sup>.

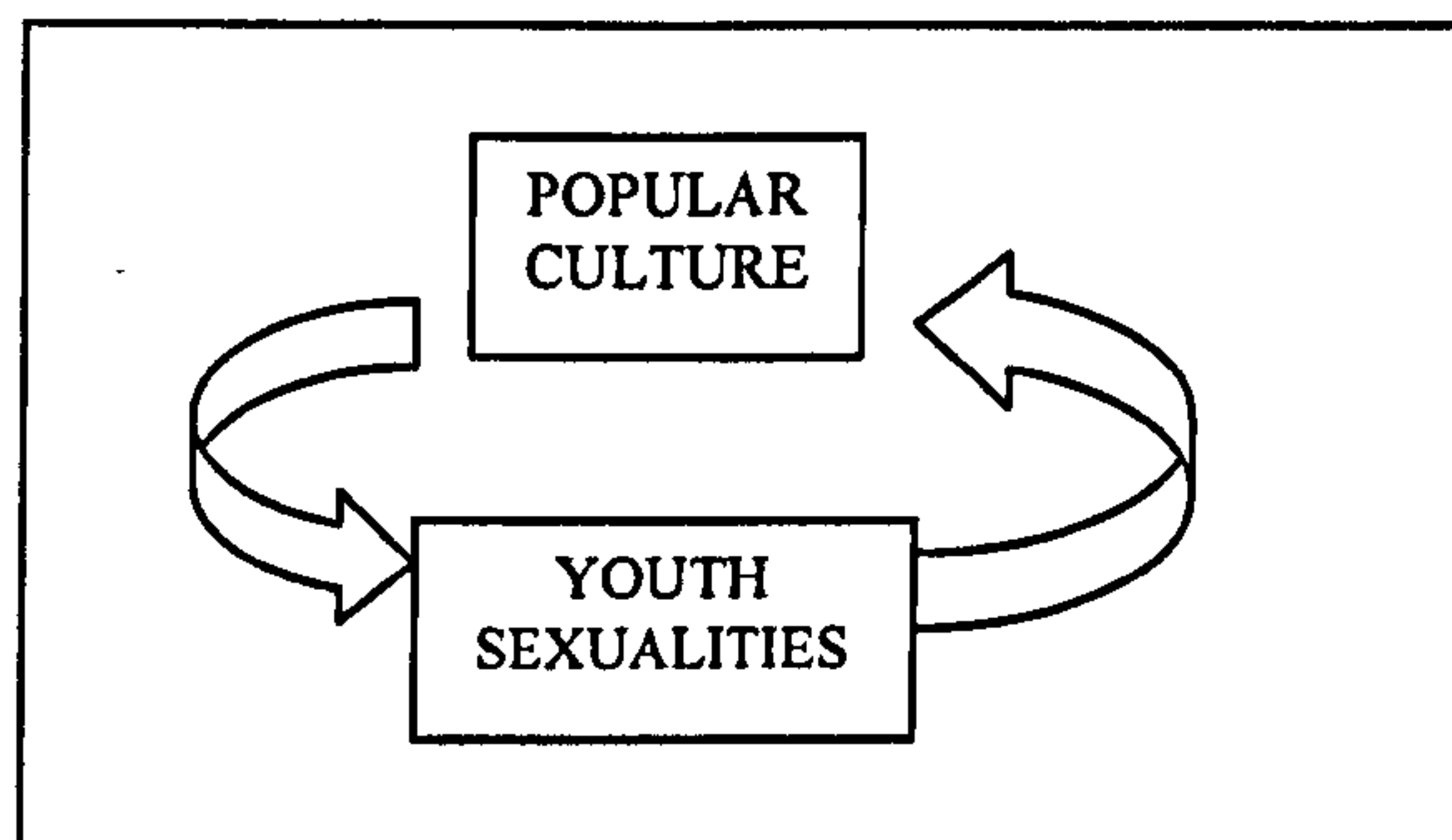
### *Popular culture*

Following from this broad notion of exploring youth sexuality, I interrogated popular culture produced by, available to, and largely consumed within diverse local youth sub-cultures. I conducted a content analysis of popular culture including the press media, broadcast – television, radio, particularly the FM stations, magazines, open-stage drama, locally produced music, costume, crafts, bill boards, etc. This was consequent to listening to narratives and experiences of youths. It was also cause for looking into particular angles of youth sexualities. From the media, I confirmed that there were different youth sub-cultures and indeed various youth sexualities. It became apparent I needed to investigate multiple angles.

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<sup>2</sup> By commencing fieldwork after only three months of registration for my PhD studies, I was breaking the usual positivistic approach to research designs common to the LSHTM – which begins with a fully-fledged well-developed research proposal with all the components such as questions, methods, sample size, sampling criteria, conceptual frameworks, etc predetermined prior to fieldwork. Basically I chose loyalty to the fundamental principle of inductive research, preferring to follow the path of the research process which developed from the field experiences and interactions with Gambian participants.

*Figure 12.2 mutual reinforcement of popular culture and youth sexualities*



Some of the questions I investigated included: What does popular culture say about youth? Within local popular culture, in what spaces are enactments, discourses, statements, etc of youth visible and negotiated? What do sports, leisure, music, media, literature, poetry, art and crafts say about youth diversities and youth sexualities? What scripts of youth are evident? How do these relate to lived enactments? Who are the actors? What is the role of youths? How are varieties of sexuality appropriated, articulated, justified, demonised, shaped, etc within these spaces of popular culture?

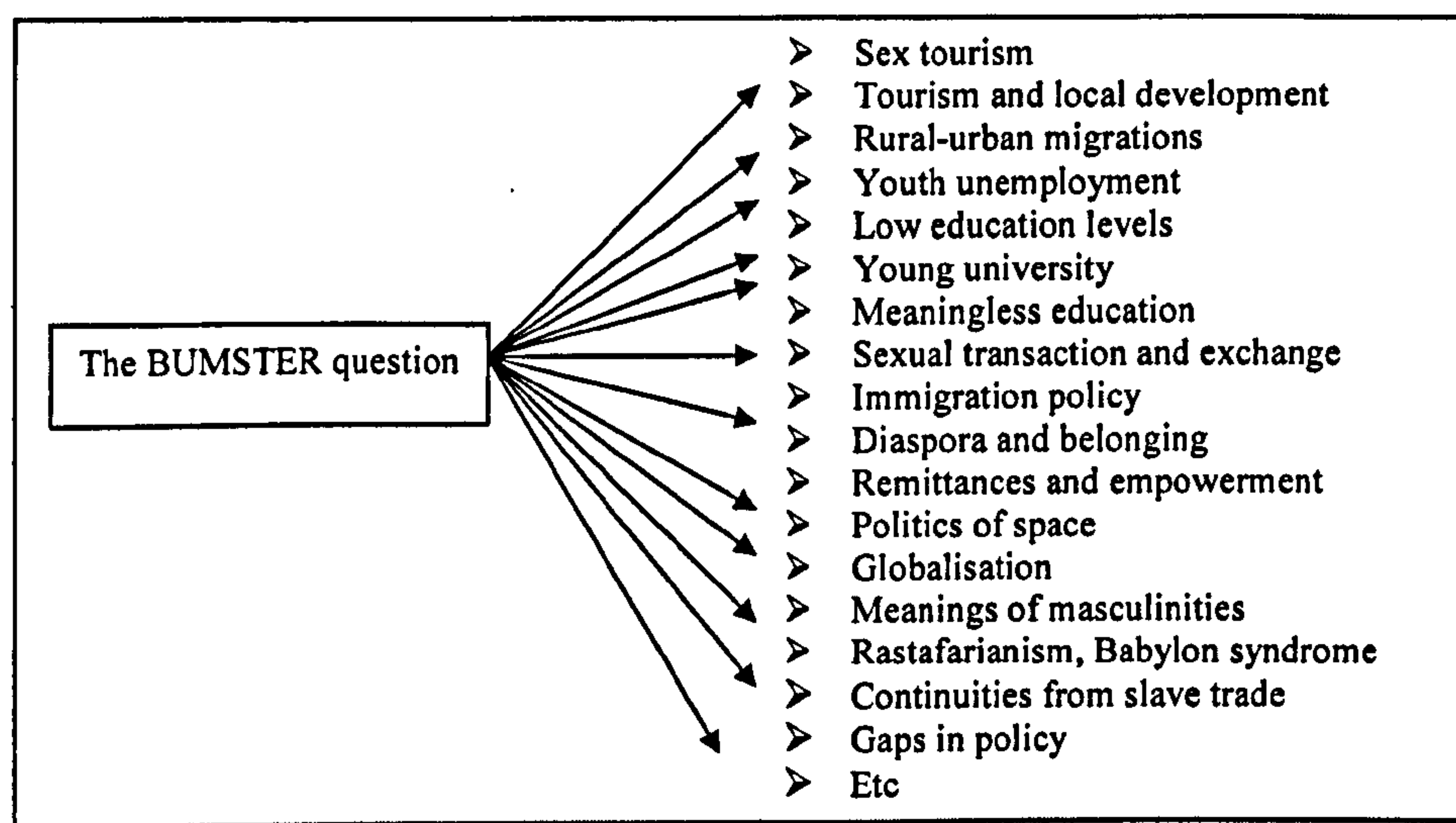
#### *The Bumster question*

Then I prioritised exploring urban youth sub-cultures and sexualities, specifically the *Bumster* question. Participant observation, and tapping into local conversations and discourses revealed widespread lay mapping of local youth sexuality, onto tourism and livelihoods. Since *bumsters* were predominantly male youths involved in offering a variety of sexual services to mainly foreign women tourists, visitors or professional immigrants from Europe and North America, I was interested in unpacking the gendered politics of these sexual interactions; how the ethos of *bumster* sexuality compared and contrasted with other youth sexualities; the milieu of local appreciations and perceptions of *bumsters*, and how this translated into public policy; enactments of personhood, youth and meaning in the everyday lives of *bumsters* and those in their immediate circles of networking, etc. Why *bumsters*? How did the phenomenon develop? How does it



impact youth sexualities in The Gambia – and the diaspora? In true ethnographic cycle style, investigating this topic unearthed several issues, many of which still remain to be investigated.

*Figure 12.3 Themes emanating from the Bumster question*



### *Urban youth sexualities*

I also explored other urban sexualities within the context, specifically focussing on the sexual lives and experiences of urban youths in Kotu – a coastal residential area of the well-to-do, as well as Tallinding-Kunjang – a peri-urban dwelling along the Serrekunda – Brikama highway. While some of these were *bumsters*, many others were also students, government employees, self-employed, seasonal migrants, etc. I developed a comparative component of the study:- how do the different youth sub-cultures compare?

### *Youth organisations*

As the fieldwork among *bumsters* was ending, I began to explore the role of belonging to a youth association, or participation in the activities of non-governmental organisations targeting youth

development. I sought to answer the questions: How does youth association membership colour youth sexualities – specifically sexual health? Which youths participate in organisations? Which organisations are available? What is their focus? Why do youths participate? How are youth organisations perceived by ordinary adults, policy makers? What is their role (if any) in the development of The Gambia? In sexual and reproductive health? Can they be a potential source, or indeed a channel of intervention? Is there a difference between rural and urban youth associations? Are they coordinated centrally? How do they interact with national programmes? I was interested in the perceptions and stories youth members, and youth organisation workers – irrespective of generation or age bracket.

#### *National policy makers*

Findings from the youth organisation workers, made it imperative for me interview youth policy makers and service providers from the grassroots to the national focal points. I was interested in their organisation, coordination, functions, roles, operation, success stories, challenges, etc. I wanted to understand how youths in The Gambia were perceived, planned for, and provided with enablers at the diverse levels. Was there a national youth policy? Who were the main actors? Was the system centralised or decentralised? How were policies enacted? What characterised the environment of youth policy development? What role did youths play (if any)? Were youth issues mainstreamed? Was their engagement with multi-sectors? What other public sectors were involved in youth affairs generally, and specifically youth sexualities and youth sub-cultures? Who was responsible for youth sexualities? How were policies and programmes for youth sexualities developed?

#### *Sexual and reproductive health*

I then explored sexual and reproductive health services available to youths in The Gambia. Policy makers mainly categorised and organised youth sexualities as a component of reproductive



health. In fact for the most part of policy and programme implementation, the focus was on reproductive health and not sexual health, let alone sexuality.

#### *National youth organisations*

Following from my explorations of the policy and programme dimensions, I pursued an investigation of specific youth problems targeted by national youth organs such as the National Youth Services Scheme (NYSS), and the National Youth Council (NYC). I explored if there were any provisions for youth sexualities in the vast array of national programmes.

#### *Rural youths*

Thereafter I explored the interaction between rural place and youth sexualities. Focussing on the same issues of organisation, main sub-cultures, discourses about propriety and youth sexuality, how rural life ethos impacted upon youth sexualities, the role of religion, the place of family, attempting to unpack reified notions of tradition and custom, were eminent emergent themes that forged the main thrusts of this particular research cycle.

#### *Elders*

Due to the strong reiteration of gerontocracy as enhanced by customary practice and Islam, I pursued this emergent thread by designing a small study focussing on the perceptions of elders who were mostly in the rural study site.

#### *The place of Marabouts*

Resulting from an association of findings from the study among reproductive health providers, rural youths, elders and policy makers, content analysis of the *vox pop*, as well as pointers from literature review, I explored the place of Islamic guides and healers locally called *marabouts*, in the sexual lives of youths in The Gambia.

### *PLWHA*

In the last ethnographic cycle, I focussed on the stories, narratives, and experiences of youthful Gambian nationals and residents who were also PLWHA. Due to an emphasis of denial and stigma within the data, I sought to understand the meaning of having a sexual life as a Gambian youth infected with HIV. Was there a national HIV/AIDS policy? What is the national response to HIV/AIDS? How does it colour the sexual lives of youths in The Gambia? What about service delivery? What programmes and interventions were available? What was the community perception towards PLWHA? How did it impact upon integration of PLWHA? How do local perceptions of HIV/AIDS shape local youth sexualities?

For all the above cycles of research, I constantly interrogated literature to compare and contrast what other scholars had written about my emerging findings.



# Appendix 13

Chapter 3: In *The Social Geography of HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa*, Obbo C., Nyanzi S. (Eds.) Dakar: CODESRIA.

## **The role and place of faith healing as alternative medicine for HIV/AIDS: a case study of**

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### ***Marabouts in a predominantly Islamic community, The Gambia***

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#### **Abstract**

Health policy in The Gambia recognises the need for collaboration with and integration of traditional healers in public healthcare services. Based on ethnographic fieldwork (utilising participant observation, focus group discussions, individual interviews, policy review and media content analysis), this paper discusses the role of faith healing – a neglected facet of alternative medicine, in efforts against HIV/AIDS. Islamic spiritual leaders and healers called *marabouts* are the focus of study. *Marabout* is a fluid-bounded label for diverse practitioners of non-biomedical healthcare. Premised within Islamic ethos, *marabouts* employ Koranic verses to heal numerous conditions, eliminate evil, and invite goodwill. Some *marabouts* believe that Allah can heal AIDS, others claim he treats related opportunistic infections. Several *marabouts* insist that ill health is God's will and a test of faith which patients must endure to know Allah better. Causation theory and therapeutic options appropriated by *marabouts* range from spiritual, through metaphysical to physical ones. Possible interventions to achieve collaboration with the formal healthcare system include harnessing the *marabouts'* institution to design and provide accurate culturally-appropriate IEC campaigns, dispelling myths and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS after education, raising awareness about the growing presence of HIV in The Gambia, providing pre- and post-test counselling, facilitating community reintegration of patients, spearheading community drives to dispel discrimination and stigmatisation of HIV-infected members, providing spiritual guidance or support and prayer, healing or treating of some symptoms, confronting non-sexual modes of HIV



transmission routed within some customary rituals, and referral of patients for VCT, care, ARVs and biomedical support.

### **Introduction**

The HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to challenge the healthcare system in resource-poor settings. Medical anthropologists (Helman 1994, Kleinman 1980) classify healthcare systems into three inter-related sectors; namely the professional, popular and folk sectors. In sub-Saharan Africa, formalised official healthcare (at policy and programme levels), is largely premised upon western biomedicine, even though the necessary resources including drugs, equipment, qualified personnel, infrastructure, occupational policy, finance, national priorities – are all greatly challenged by multiple social, political, economic and cultural factors.

However, complementary or alternative medicine (Spencer and Jacobs 1999, Vincent and Furnham 1997) is a popular health sector, particularly the fluid terrain referred to as African traditional medicine (Sindiga et al 1995, Swiderski 1995). Several studies (Akerele 1987, Boerma and Mgalla 2001, Chipfakacha 1997) reveal that many patients and their carers consult and utilise traditional healers either as their prime healthcare providers, or as the first port of call, or even in combination with other providers. This is particularly common for issues related to sexual health (Sundy and Jacobus 2001, Marcham 2003, Benjarrattanaporn et al 1997). A much less studied aspect of alternative medicine is faith healing, even though it is a vibrant and rapidly growing health sector which is highly sought and utilised by both providers and clients (Nyanzi 2003, Devisch 1996).

This study contributes to others that have investigated the role and place of faith healing in the health sector. This paper particularly engages with the role of *marabouts* (Islamic guides) in the struggle to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic in The Gambia.

### **Why study *Marabouts*?**



Geertz 1968 superbly describes and discusses the roots, evolution and multiple meanings of the term *marabout*. 'Marabout is a French rendering of the Arabic *murabit*, which in turn derives from a root meaning to tie, bind, fasten, attach, hitch, moor. A *murabit* is thus a man tied, bound, fastened to God like a camel to a post, a ship to a pier, a prisoner to a wall; or more appropriately, as *ribat*, another derivative, means a fortified sanctuary, a place of *marabouts*, like a monk to a monastery... men, in some almost tangible sense, attached, bound, tied – perhaps the best word is shackled – to God (or anyway regarded to be so)...' page 43. He goes on to explain 'the content of this bond, as well as the sign of its existence and the result of its operation, was,... *baraka*. Literally, *baraka* means blessing, in the sense of divine favour. But spreading out from that nuclear meaning, specifying and delimiting it, it encloses a whole range of linked ideas: material prosperity, physical well-being, bodily satisfaction, completion, luck, plenitude, and, the aspect most stressed by Western writers anxious to force it into a pigeonhole with mana, magical power. In broadest terms, *baraka* is not, as it has often been represented, a parapsychical force, a kind of spiritual electricity. Like the notion of the exemplary centre, it is a conception of the mode in which the divine reaches into the world. Implicit, uncriticised, and far from systematic, it too is a doctrine. Rather than electricity, *baraka* is personal presence, force of character, moral vividness. *Marabouts* have *baraka* in the way that men have strength, courage, dignity, skill, beauty or intelligence. Like these, though it is not the same as these, nor even all of them put together, it is a gift which some men have in greater degree than others, and which a few *marabouts* have in superlative degree. The problem is to decide who (not only among the living, but also among the dead) has it, and how to benefit from it... (page 44). *Marabouthood*, the possession of *baraka*, was indexed either by wonder-working, a reputation for causing unusual things to occur, or by supposed lineal descent from the Prophet... (page 45). Joffe 1997 also discusses the evolution of the *murabit*. Performed miracles are the proof of *baraka* among Sufi *marabouts* in Africa (Rosander 1997:9). In West Africa, *marabouts* are consulted for every aspect of social, cultural, economic



and even political life (Gemmeke 2004). In The Gambia, *marabout* is a generic label for Islamic guides who also use verses of the Islamic scripture – Koran as therapy for diverse conditions. According to Sillah (2001:7) ‘consultation of these medical practitioners for health reasons, personal wellbeing and prospects in life is in the psyche of the Gambian. Invariably one could hardly walk the streets or visit homes without noticing people adorned with evil-repelling spiritual symbols *jujus*<sup>1</sup> and the entrances of habitations decorated with like substances or the giving out of charities for the alleviation of predicaments or achievements of one’s desires’.

Initial ethnographic participant observation in rural Gambia revealed that *marabouts* do not only heal physical illness like disease in the body, but also influence the course of action of those who consult them for guidance. The actions of many Gambians depend on and thus reflect the position of their *marabouts*. Though not immediately obvious to an outsider observer, *marabouts* hold immense power to direct the actions of the individual and collective lives of Gambians. Therefore we posited that *marabouts* could play pivotal roles in HIV/AIDS-related interventions at the levels of prevention, education, treatment, care and support (cf. Chipfakacha 1997). It was therefore necessary to understand how they construct, interpret and appropriate the HIV/AIDS metaphor in their lives and practice. In addition, in order to understand how individuals and communities in The Gambia are interpreting, affected by and responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, we explored meanings embedded within lay understandings of HIV/AIDS among *marabouts*.

Furthermore, *marabouts* provide an opportunity to study the much neglected sphere of contemporary faith healing as an alternative medicine in itself, and more specifically Islamic-based faith healing. Lastly, most studies of traditional medicine in The Gambia focus on traditional birth attendants who have been integrated into the formal primary healthcare system

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<sup>1</sup> *Jujus* are charms to ward off evil, heal a condition, or bring luck.



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(Nyanzi et al 2007, Bij de Vaate et al 2002, Walraven and Weeks 1999). Much less attention is given to male traditional healers.

This paper focuses on a discussion of the deeply nuanced meanings of who a *marabout* is, the place of *marabouts* in the Gambian healthcare system, how *marabouts* interpret HIV/AIDS, what they offer to persons living with HIV/AIDS, their role in the effort to combat the epidemic, and suggests possible areas of intervention.

### **Context: A synopsis of The Gambia**

Situated as a tongue within Senegal and bordered on the west by the Atlantic Ocean, The Gambia is the smallest country in West Africa. According to provisional results of the 2003 population and housing census, it has a total national population of 1,364,507 people, most of whom depend on subsistence agriculture of rice, groundnuts, millet and sorghum (Central Statistics Department 2004). The predominant ethnic groups are Mandinka, Wollof and Fula. The majority of Gambians are Muslim. Though not an Islamic state, Islam is a major organising influence which determines social, cultural, economic and political relations and endeavours at the individual, community and national levels. However, many social cultural spaces reveal measures of tolerance of other ethos such as Christianity. HIV prevalence rate is 2.2% in the general population and 1.7% in antenatal clinic attendees (Department of State for Health 2000:2).

Public health services in The Gambia are delivered through a three-tier system based on the primary healthcare strategy (Department of State for Health 2000). Healthcare services are presently provided by three public hospitals, 36 health facilities at the secondary level and 492 health posts at the primary level (Department of State for Health 2002). The public health system is complemented by 34 private and nongovernmental clinics. Community-based primary healthcare has been running in selected villages in The Gambia since 1980. It involves partnership between community volunteers who work as village health workers, a traditional birth attendant who is trained by the government Divisional Health Team, a government paid



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community health nurse on one hand, and referral health services available at dispensaries and health centres on the other hand. Earlier research (Sundby and Jacobus 2001) reports a relatively less developed referral system in The Gambia, as compared to other African contexts. Primary healthcare workers provide continuous health education, treatment of simple illnesses and injuries, essential drugs and referral to members of primary healthcare villages (Department of State for Health 2002:4).

The most current health policy entitled Changing for Good acknowledges the importance of traditional healers in The Gambia. 'Usually for most communities, the first point of contact in seeking care for the sick is the traditional system of care and this cannot be ignored. As the communities believe in and use the traditional system of care, there is need to establish partnership with traditional healers. Some of the traditional methods of care have proven to be effective and need to be promoted (2000:14).' In this policy document, one objective of the five year strategic goal is 'to effectively utilise traditional health practices in the formal health care'. Strategies to achieve this include 'to integrate traditional healers into the formal healthcare system, use of traditional structures in the provision of healthcare, and patenting and trade marking traditional knowledge and medicines' (page 14).

### **The study**

The study was conducted in two administrative divisions namely: Western division and North Bank division; chosen specifically to represent urban and rural geographical spatial divides respectively. Diverse traditional healers were recruited from ethnically diverse areas including; Marakissa, Brufut (Ghana town), Bakau, Banjul, Esseu, Berending, Barra, Sita Nunku.



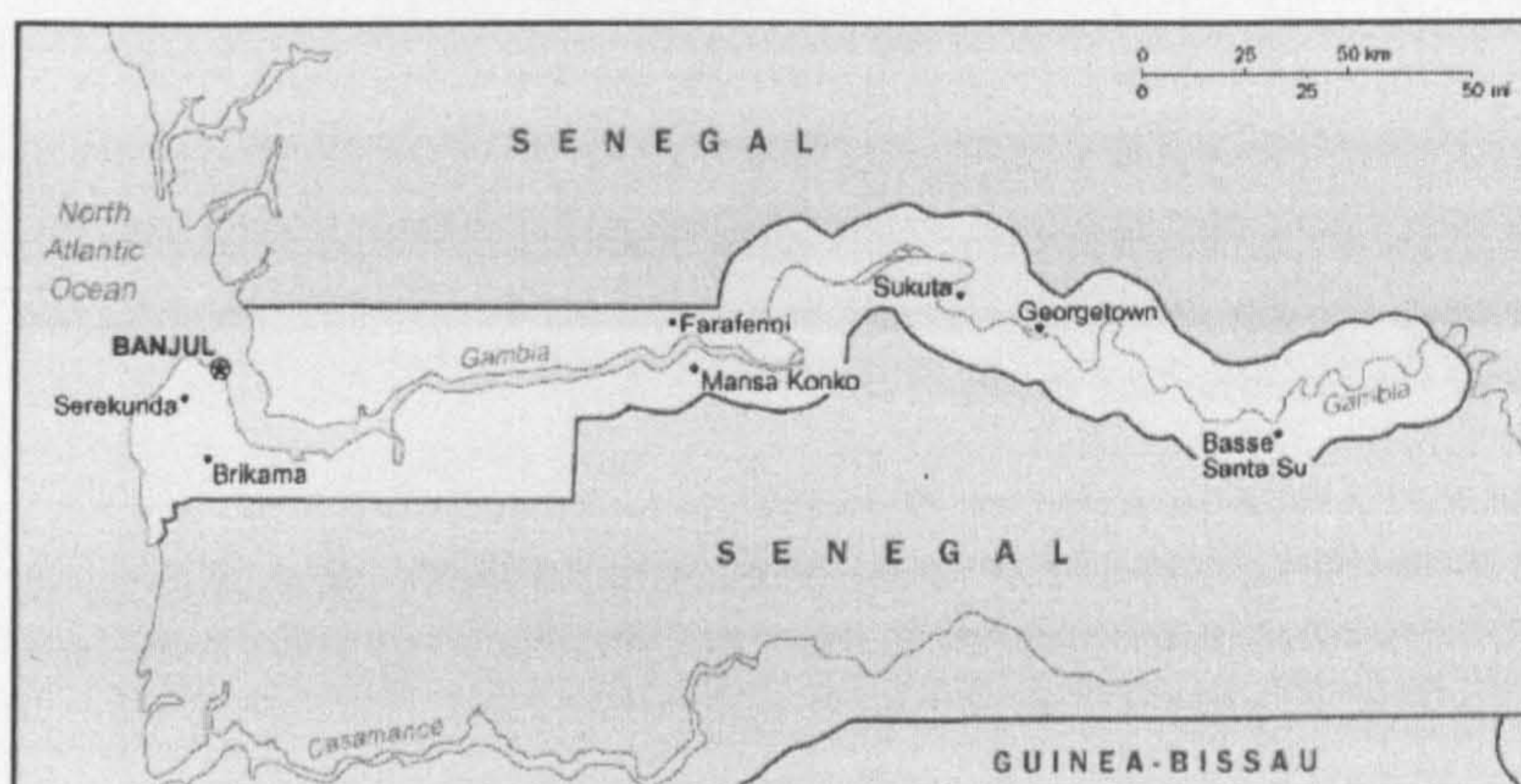


Figure 1. Map of The Gambia

### The research study

This study was a component of a larger ethnographic study about the lived realities of sexual and reproductive health in The Gambia. Earlier research, which involved SN - a Ugandan anthropologist living among diverse Gambian sub-cultures, started in November 2002. During this preliminary fieldwork, the critical role of non-Western biomedical modes of therapy emerged as a strong theme in the data. Subsequently, and in accordance with the cyclical ethnographic process (see Spradley 1979), this study further investigated the role of *marabouts* – one group out of many others providing alternative therapies. Thus it is important that the reader considers it as feeding into a broader, holistic study of sexuality and reproductive health in the time of HIV/AIDS.

This was a cross sectional study premised within a social constructionist epistemology that sought to move away from the reification of culture - our main focus of study. Therefore the theoretical framework and methodological approach were specifically designed to generate rich textual data about how meaning is constantly constructed.

### Methodology



### ***Theoretical framework and methodological approach***

The theoretical framework combined both interpretive theory with critical social theory in order to garner data about how people are socialised to accept the view of dominant ideologies and institutions, and how they creatively resist and transform these definitions (Agger 1998, Denzin 1992, Holstein and Miller 1993). In its canonical version (Blumer 1969), symbolic interactionism is based on three assumptions: 'human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them', the meanings of things arise out of the process of social interaction, meanings are modified through an interpretive process which involves self-reflective individuals symbolically interacting with one another. Interpretive symbolic interactionism (Denzin 1992, 1989, 1990) approaches materials from a narrative, textual position, understanding that the texts create the subject matter written about (Brown 1989, Richardson 1990).

The study was based on the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), which emphasises the inductive generation, elaboration and validation of theory inherently grounded within systematically analysed qualitative data (see also Haig 1995). The central components of grounded theory include constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, coding procedures, interpretive strategies and generation of theories grounded in the data. The data collection, data analysis and hypothesis generation processes are cyclical and interrelated in that each depends on and influences the other (Glaser 1978, Glaser and Strauss 1967, Wells 1995, Robrecht 1995). Grounded theory provides the structure often lacking in other qualitative approaches without sacrificing flexibility or rigour (Calloway and Knapp 1995). Consequently the resulting theory is an explanation of embedded categories, their properties and the relationships among them.

### ***Data collection***

Intensive ethnographic fieldwork was triangulated with extensive literature review, policy analysis and content analysis of the vox pop particularly national newspapers. The three co-



authors (a female Ugandan anthropologist and two male Gambian experienced ethnographers) resided in the homes of different traditional healers for periods of intensive structured participant observation. Ethnographic participant observation was also conducted in two traditional medicine clinic complexes, one in North Bank Division and the other in the Western Division, during the months of February and March 2005. The research team observed and participated in the collection of herbs, preparation of herbal concoctions, diagnostic sessions, healing ceremonies, follow-up of patients, some meetings of traditional healers' associations. The female anthropologist underwent public rituals of conversion into Islam, sat under Islamic teachers to learn to pray, recite some scriptures and obtain a grasp of the basic principles of the Muslim way of life. As a research team, we often participated in ablution – bodily enactments of cleansing in preparation for prayer, communal prayers, recitation of scriptures, etc in the communities of *marabouts* whose emphasis of therapy was based on Islamic scripture. We played roles as patients of and apprentices to the healers. Observations were recorded daily as field notes. The team regularly discussed experiences during debriefing sessions in order to compare notes and revise thematic issues to look out for. Thus typical to grounded theory, the fieldwork evolved with more field experiences.

Formal qualitative research methods of data collection complemented the above techniques (Bernard 1994). Repeat focus group discussions were organised around social-cultural divides that shape and govern conversation, communication and interaction between the sexes, different age groups, ethnicities, and the healing specialisation. Focus group discussions are vital tools for gathering information about the collective experience and social norms as they are constructed, practiced or perceived at the group level (Kreuger & Casey 2000, Morgan 1997, Kitzinger 1994, 1995, Stewart & Shamdasani 1992, Kreuger 1988). In addition, formal in-depth interviews were conducted in order to further investigate the individual experience of particular themes that emerged during the group sessions. Follow-up interviews were also conducted with key informants from the Department of State for Health and Social Welfare



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(DOSH&SW), hospital management, Divisional Health Team members, related policy makers, religious leaders like *imams* who are not necessarily *marabouts*, as well as patients and family of participating healers.

All formal interview sessions were conducted in the presence of the anthropologist in the language of preference of the participant by the multi-lingual ethnographers, recorded on audio tape, transcribed verbatim, translated from the local languages into English and entered into computer. Field notes from participant observation and PRA sessions were also entered into computer.

Literature review (Cooper 1998, Hart 1998, Fink 1998) informed the research about what has been written about the main themes emergent during fieldwork; situated study findings within wider issues in the Gambian context, and how they relate to other African experiences; provided background information about the historical, social, economic, cultural, spiritual developments in diverse African subcultures of alternative or traditional medicine, HIV/AIDS care of patients and prevalent health policy. Literature also played a key role in the development of subsequent data collection directions – in accordance with the grounded theory approach (Dick 2002). It was important that the literature review was not only responsive to the data, but that it was also treated as a potential source of disconfirming evidence to the emerging theory. Therefore, the literature was treated as data providing basis for further comparison. Furthermore, literature review included content analysis of related popular culture including media presentations over radio and in the newspapers. Policy review about alternative medicine and HIV/AIDS care in The Gambia involved analysing content of documents, policy statements, and media presentations; and interviewing policy makers and implementers, as well as people who deliver services in these fields.

#### **Data analysis**

Qualitative data were subjected to narrative analysis using Atlas.TI (Scientific Software Development, Berlin), a computer software package designed to analyse volumes of qualitative



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data and based on the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Texts and observations were coded using inductively generated codes to label important themes and topics. Coded segments were then compared within and between data sets, thus generating higher-order generalizations (Miles and Huberman 1994, Fielding and Lee 1998). Review of policy documents, texts and other popular culture predominantly employed content analysis. Quantitative data generated about the demographic profile of study participants were statistically analysed using Epi Info 6.1 (Centers for Disease Control).

#### ***Ethical considerations***

Approval for the study was obtained from the National Council of Arts and Culture – a government body responsible for the clearance and approval of all anthropological and ethnographic studies to be conducted in the country. The research design (specifically methodology and ethics) was subjected to collective scrutiny and discussion by resource persons and participants of the CODESRIA initiative on social sciences and HIV/AIDS, during a methodological workshop held prior to commencement of fieldwork.

Measures to ensure confidentiality of information provided include designating an identification number to each participant instead of actual names, saving all documents under password, storing hard copies and scripts under key and lock, training the ethnographers in the importance of confidentiality, advance preparation of private venues to hold discussions.

After sensitisation and recruitment, participants were given a chance to consent to participate in the study, or refuse. Both the information sheet and consent form were piloted and modified accordingly. A box for thumb-prints was added for un-lettered participants who were the majority.

We initially attempted to access the healers through contact persons responsible for traditional medicine in the DOSH&SW. However they hampered our progress by imposing numerous bureaucratic conditions including an exorbitant budget for their facilitation to tag along our team, per diems per session per participant, unfulfilled promises of connecting us to ‘powerful



*marabouts*' or those who were registered with them, etc. After wasting two months and resources, we opted to meet the *marabouts* on our own in their places of operation. We were amazed to find that word had already reached many of the *marabouts* in associations affiliated with these DOSH&SW officials stressing that they should not agree to participate in our study unless we gave them particular sums of money for time they spent with us. This necessitated intense negotiation with participants about monetary payments for research time. They lamented about unethical conduct of previous academic researchers who exploited the healers, making careers out of the information they gathered and yet neither acknowledging nor rewarding them for their input. They even mentioned researchers who promised in vain to return and help solve the problems expressed by healers. Eventually we reached a joint decision to give each participant 150 Dalasis at the very end of the study, in addition to contributions to their associations.

#### **Fluid boundaries of meaning of 'Marabout'**

The dominant understanding among study participants – both *marabouts* and other key informants who did not identify as such – was that the term was supposed to strictly refer to male experts of the Koran, who possess unique knowledge of and power to translate agency into Islamic scriptures relevant for healing, protection against harm from spirits or men, and granting favours. In our study, only men identified with this majority definition (*cf* Robinson's (2004) suggestion of 'male dominance' as opposed to 'male monopoly'). In a study based in Senegal, which explored the possibility of women to work in this domain, Gemmeke 2004:72 states, 'next to nothing was known about *marabout* women. Although some people have heard about them, nobody had met such a woman. *Marabout* women seem to be a *contradictio in terminis*, as *maraboutage* in West Africa is generally associated with the magical-religious practices of male specialists of the Qur'an.' <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Unlike other contexts in Africa where Muslim women have been reported to work as *marabouts*, spiritual healers, shamans, or soothsayers, we did not come across or hear of any woman who was a *marabout* using



This gender disparity is perhaps related to the fact that Islamic scholarship to the point of becoming a public instructor is a male domain, although Koranic school is open to both boys and girls. Girls complete at most 4 years of instruction, but boys can go on to study as scholars who will later be instructors. The widespread *talibeh* institution<sup>3</sup> is predominantly for boys who are in apprenticeship to male grand *marabouts*.

It was striking that key informants as diverse as members of DOSH&SW, DHTs, villages and even *marabouts* themselves, named healers who used more than the Koran to administer therapy, when we asked them to list some popular *marabouts* they knew. On reaching these named people, we learnt that while some only used Koranic verses for healing, several others combined scriptures with remedies from herbs or animal products, a few were non-biomedical bone-setters who also prayed over their therapy. We were even referred to women who worked as clairvoyants, herbalists, soothsayers or traditional birth attendants. This diversity revealed the multiplicity of meanings embedded within the label *marabout*. Translated as *cherno* in Fula, *serigne* in Wollof, and *moroo* in Mandinka, *marabout* is also a popular generic label for healer. Thus in Mandinka lexicon, a healer is called *moroo* or *jarala*, a herbalist specifically is called *suru moroo* meaning 'marabout of roots'. We were also referred to some *juberlaa* (soothsayers) who use sticks or cowrie shells to prophesy. *Ada jarala* is a traditional healer and *doktoroo* is a medical doctor. When asked to distinguish between healthcare systems, participants reported that there was *moofin jaralo* – black man's medicine, and biomedicine which was often referred to as *Toubabs'* (- meaning White man's) medicine. Unlike predominantly Christian societies where faith healing and traditional medicine are distinct and apart, in The Gambia the dividing line is very fluid, with Islamic healing by *marabouts* often merging into traditional medicine.

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Islamic scripts for diagnosis, prescription or prognosis; although we made efforts to probe about this gender dimension. Instead, we found that female healers in our study context, operated with herbal medicines, traditional remedies, bone-setting, as lay birth attendants, or shrine-priestesses among practitioners of animistic African traditional religion,

<sup>3</sup> Children leave home for long periods (years) to live with, learn from and work for senior Islamic scholars.



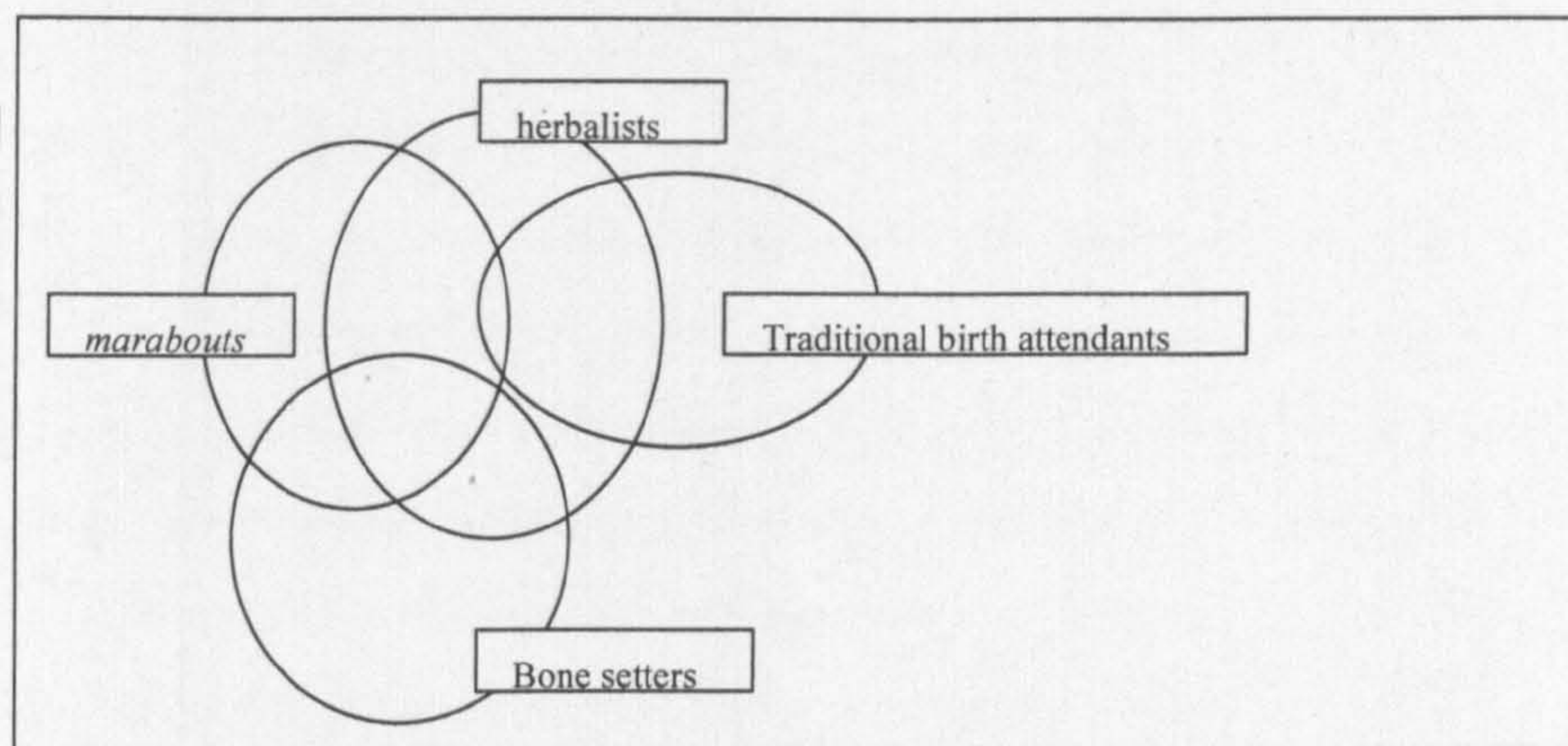


Figure 2. The inter-locking traditional healthcare system in The Gambia

This mix not only highlights the fluidity of boundaries of lay meanings associated with *marabout*, but also reveals the inadequacy of English to capture lexical codes and expressions surrounding the lay healthcare system in The Gambia. This resonates with the complexity of labelling aspects of non-biomedical healthcare (Swiderski 1995).

### Therapeutic classification

Data analysis reveals a continuum of therapies appropriated by the *marabouts* in our study. These range from the spiritual through the metaphysical to the physical.

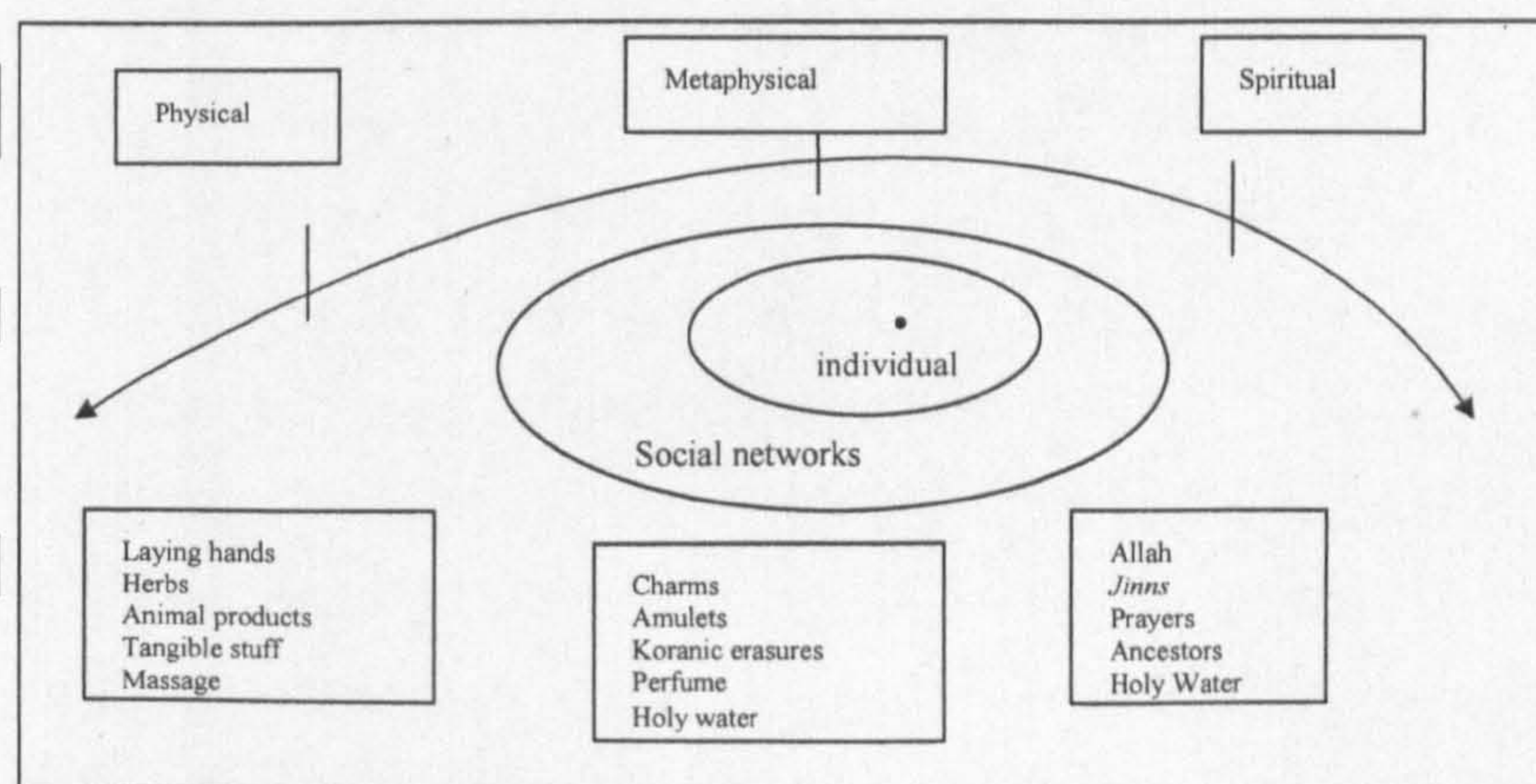


Figure 3. Classification of *marabout* therapeutic options



The remedy appropriated reflects the *marabout's* explanatory model for causation of the illness or condition (see Helman 2003 for a discussion of the relation between therapy and causation theory). True to the original interpretation of their occupational name – *marabout*, several participants emphasised that they utilised specific Koranic verses to heal conditions, either as revealed by spiritual leaders called *serignes* or *grand marabout*, or through dreams or visions, or garnered as apprentices through induction from mentors, or from exchanges with other healers (cf Geertz's 1968 discussion about the transmission of *baraka* from one predecessor *marabout* to the successor). Koranic verses are written with either chalk or charcoal onto wooden slates. Thereafter they are erased off the slate either as chalk dust or charcoal powder and mixed with shea butter or palm oil to make a lotion that could be smeared onto the body. Alternatively, the written verses are erased off the slate with water and the erasure is either drunk by the patient, smeared over the body as a moisturiser or mixed into bathwater and used for washing the body. In the absence of wooden slates, other *marabouts* write the healing scriptures on a piece of paper and then burn the paper into fine ash, which is utilised as a healing portion to be rubbed onto the body or blended with other materials into a lotion or tied up in animal skins or cloths or horns and worn as *jujus* on the body. Other *marabouts* wrap the actual paper slip with koranic verses in *juju* pockets. The text takes on potency and agency to change situations spurred on by faith as well as the administration by a spiritually gifted *marabout*. The power of these erasures is in the interpretation of the embedded meanings of the koranic text as the word of God who has power to either heal or destroy (see also El-Tom 1985 for a discussion of similar erasures among the Berti of the Sudan).

In addition to these erasures of koranic verses, *marabouts* employ the power of Islamic prayer as therapy. Appropriating notions of purity and pollution as symbolically represented by physical acts of cleanliness or dirtiness, they take their patients through performances of ablution prior to administration of prayer which often precludes diagnosis of any condition.



Pa Malick: There is much power in this action here of performing ablution. We wash the entrances of the body which are ways in for Satan. A clean body means Allah can start working because he is not welcome to a dirty body. So if it is a woman, she must wash her body and then she comes and we perform ablution and we pray before I can start my work well. Definitely ablution must be done before we pray.

Interviewer: What if it is a man?

Pa Malick: And he too must perform ablution before he can sit on this mat. **Individual**

#### **interview**

The *marabout* then repetitively makes different ritual prayers (*swallah*) in Arabic together with his patient, with the aid of the Islamic prayer beads including '*Bismiliahi*', '*Istagafullah*', '*Laila ilalahi*'. Thereafter the patient holds their hands out to the *marabout* who prays (*dua*) specifically for the condition whether warding off evil or praying for protection or good luck or health. The patient periodically interjects the prayer with agreement saying, "Amin Amin" or "Amin Yalla Amin!" At the end of the prayers, the *marabout* spits at the patient who rubs his hands together and then passes them over their forehead. In the process the *marabout* would also listen for any messages concerning the future wellbeing of the supplicant or patient particularly regarding the condition needing divine intervention. Revelation was simultaneous in some instances or protracted over a series of consultations lasting several days. Many *marabouts* claimed it was of utmost importance to maintain open communication with Allah because he often revealed the root causes of conditions and the necessary steps to restoration or recovery either through visions or intuitively or dreams in the night. Diagnosis of conditions was conducted either using mystical materials like cowrie shells, horns, water, the *massaka* – a mat that rolls out at the mention of the affliction of the patient. Others conducted diagnosis using dialogue with the patient, carers and interceding spirits, or physical touch.

In their therapy, *marabouts* also used *materia medica* comprising of items acquired during the holy pilgrimage – *hejira* to Mecca, the holy Islamic city. The most common was holy water



locally called *zamzam*, which was mostly in the possession of urban-based *marabouts* that had access either as pilgrims or to other pilgrims. This holy water was specifically used in conditions related to satanic influences specifically through non-Muslim *jinns* and witchcraft. The *zamzam* was either drunk as a portion or used to mix remedies with erasures for drinking, smearing or bathing. Perfume purchased in Medina or Mecca was also sprayed over patients during diagnosis or administration of therapy. Participants explained that Allah dwells in a scented place – perhaps the perfume scent would invoke his healing presence. One grand *marabout* employed a silver ring to diagnose the illnesses of his patients, as well as to decide what therapy to prescribe. He ran the silver ring over the patient's body, stopping to press here and there, as he listened to an inner guide. Placing the silver ring in a glass of water, he made gurgling and deep belching sounds over the patients as he watched the glass. Meanwhile he would also pray using his prayer beads. After a number of *rakats* he would order the patient to rapidly drink down the water with the silver ring at the bottom. Thereafter he would ask the patient to exercise the body, check for the pain and see whether they still hurt. Healing in this instance was supposed to be instantaneous. Though strange to the outsider observer, local Gambians believed in the power of his therapy. During our participant observation residency at his home, the popularity of this *marabout* brought him patients from near and far, consulting about conditions as diverse as impotence, infertility, yellow fever, a sprained ankle, fire burns, malaria, skin rashes, stomach upset, and prayers for popularity at work.

Along with the spiritual ministration, *marabouts* variously counselled their patients; giving advice about individual composure, social comportment, lifestyle as well as relationships with others in the immediate kin group and the wider community. Their diagnoses and prescriptions often sought to restore equilibrium in social relationships with family, friends, the community, adversaries, as well as the ancestors, spirits and Allah. They prophesied about the future life trajectory of patients on condition of fulfilling particular requirements.



Metaphysical therapy involved utilisation of quasi-spiritual powers to intervene in situations. This particularly applied to conditions which were associated with witchcraft, sorcery or spirit possession or interference by spirits known as *jinns*. *Marabouts* variously explained that while Allah created healthy beings, Satan his adversary was sometimes invoked by malicious people to cause ill-health. When disease struck, study participants explained that Allah had allowed it because he knew what was best for individuals. Therefore disease, if seen to come from Allah, was often accepted as 'God's will' or even 'a test of faith' and prayers were made for patients to remain faithful in their knowledge of Allah through this situation. This confirms findings of other scholars (Sundby 1997, Rassool 2000, Adib 2003) concerning Muslims' attitudes toward health and illness. However when *jinns* or witchcraft were suspected to be responsible for the condition, then spiritual healing was necessary to combat this situation. This often necessitated sacrifice or pouring of libation for appeasement to the ancestral spirits. Some *marabouts* emphasised the distinction between *marabouts* who solely appropriated the Koran and Allah's power on one hand, and those who engaged in spiritual consultation with the ancestral spirits. Other *marabouts* explained that they performed both these forms of healing as mutually supporting entities, whereby some conditions necessitated one or the other and some required syncretism between the two. *Marabouts* who only utilised the Koran were emphatic and quick to dissociate from the latter category.

Another therapeutic category comprises *marabouts* who administer bio-physical *materia medica* to heal ailments. Many of these were traditional healers who mixed herbal concoctions from medicinal plants. There were also others who appropriated animal products including horns, beaks, fish-scales, dried body parts, rare animal products like the saliva of a chameleon, the skin of a python, the hide of a monitor lizard, the needles of a porcupine etc to administer healing to the physical body of their patients. Some of these healers stressed that they were strictly traditional healers who did not tap into the religio-spiritual terrain. However the majority practised a synchronisation which combined erasures from the Koran with herbal



remedies in one concoction. Pound dry herbs for treating skin rash could be mixed in petroleum jelly with powder from the Koranic verses rubbed off slates. Diagnosis often involved Islamic prayer, followed by verbal consultation and physical examination, consultation of the oracles, using cowrie shells and then a syncretic solution combining the religious, spiritual, metaphysical or physical and/ or pharmacological. In fact we did observe some *marabouts* mixing crashed 'Paracetamol' tablets with a herbal concoction for pain relief. This reveals a therapeutic hybrid that even embraces some forms of biomedicine. Another popular *marabout* prescribed a copper bangle for hypertension but insisted he had to pray over the metal, and that the patient had to daily pray in order for the bangle to continue its effectiveness. Similar syncretism is discussed by Westerlund 1997:321-322 '... in many rural parts of Africa the Sufi fraternities are still the only communities that can provide a form of social security. Among other things, in the case of illness Sufi *shaykhs* may provide healing with traditional methods. Religious etiologies and treatment form an important part of these methods...'

### **Emic interpretations of HIV/AIDS among *marabouts***

All the *marabouts* in the study had heard about HIV/AIDS, particularly over the radio, at health education seminars arranged by diverse community extension workers either from the Divisional Health Team, or the existing nongovernmental organisations. However the majority of *marabouts* claimed that they had never seen anyone with HIV/AIDS. Data analyses reveal several individual and collective debates about the actuality of HIV/AIDS generally, but most frequently in The Gambian context. In both study sites, *marabouts* denied outright the possibility of HIV/AIDS in their immediate surrounding. It was not uncommon to disown the epidemic and instead transfer it to other social groups.



Ahmed: Ah I have heard about AIDI. But I think it is there in those other countries. It is not here because we treat ill people all the time. But I have not heard one of us saying, "Yes I have seen AIDI or I have treated a man with AIDI." **Individual interview**

Oustas: I think maybe it is a disease for *Toubabs* [white men]. And then now our people who marry with *Toubabs* end up catching it. But if we stay only among ourselves we shall not catch this sickness. **Individual interview**

It was striking that HIV/AIDS has not yet gotten a localised name, such that even though most participants discussed in the local languages they resorted to approximations of the English name, thereby generating a range of pronunciations of AIDS including 'AIDI, AIJI, Ech, Eiz, Eezi, Eds, etc' but 'AIDI was the most common.

Many *marabouts* claimed to heal AIDS; a few boldly making related headlines in national newspapers. Some were more cautious in their claims, stating that they heal opportunistic infections associated with AIDS. A few others merely debated about the biomedical version of 'no cure' which clashed with the notion of an almighty Allah who can deal with every human problem. Based on a dichotomous logic - 'Allah created man and woman, day and night, life and death, hunger and satisfaction...' they argued that 'He also created cures for every illness'. Therefore they believed that with Allah, there was a cure for AIDS. The two we pursued after reading their claims in the newspapers were indeed adamant and insisted that Allah was not limited like men are. One even referred us to a patient he had 'healed' of HIV. Many other *marabouts* reported that AIDS was not new but an illness they had been treating for ages.

While discussing notions of pollution, many *marabouts* not only blamed HIV/AIDS on other peoples and those who sexually mixed with them, but also on 'sinful' sexual mixing through illegitimate sexual relationships with non-marital sexual partners. Steeped within deep religiosity, several *marabouts* claimed that the present generation was highly promiscuous and AIDS was one of the curses they were reaping from this sinfulness.



Sheikh Mustapha: These young people sleep with different partners who they are not married to. I am not talking about *chaggas* – prostitutes. No. I am telling you about normal people who have this one and that one and that one. Allah says it is better to marry with a woman. Yes, it is better to marry. But no. They just change people all the time. That is why there is AIDS. **Focus group discussion**

Sowe: Allah sees how wicked the earth is. Now people are very wicked. So he is punishing the world. How can we sin and think Allah does not know what to do with us? He is punishing us. So we no longer have much rains, there is no plentiful harvest from our fields, people have not enough money. And now we are having this incurable illness. If people turn to Allah he will heal. Yes, definitely Allah can heal everything because he knows it. Nothing is beyond Allah. **Individual interview**

Some *marabouts* interpreted HIV/AIDS as a curse from God due to increasing godlessness. Others thought it was a fruit of the wrath of the ancestors because present-day Gambians were rejecting their cultural worship and instead following the ways of *Toubabs*. A few others tapped into conspirational theories – blaming the origin of the epidemic on the West who are on a mission to depopulate Africa. The last category of *marabouts* dialogued with the public health discourse based on virology and the presence of an unmanageable and constantly changing virus. Obviously they were working with unwritten social scripts from health education anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns. They variously presented HIV as a virus that was perhaps created in American laboratories and transmitted to strategically placed Africans in economically viable/ profitable regions to the West. Related to this was the debate about the porosity of condoms, or otherwise the infective nature of the lubricant in condoms, or the effect of the condom on a man's virility to the extent of causing gradual impotence. Focus group discussions with elderly men often turned passionate when participants debated the logic behind promoting condoms as protection against infection. Many elderly *marabouts* reasoned that condoms, if protective, would actually incite younger people to seek sex where they would



have instead abstained. In one village, the *marabouts* totally deconstructed the promotion of condom use because they argued it was only profiting Western industries. They reasoned that HIV/AIDS was only marketing Western businesses. They were bitter that 'government was inappropriately distributing a lot of money to anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns that were based on Western propaganda instead of focussing on Gambian priorities'.

A major departure from this construction was the frequent and widespread claims from the *marabouts* that HIV/AIDS is an old illness that they have been healing from time immemorial, in different forms. They tended to describe opportunistic diseases that came with the progression to AIDS. Among some Mandinka *marabouts* in the study, HIV/AIDS was linked to a culturally-bound syndrome called *chiring pongo*. They reported that *chiring pongo* shares several symptoms that are typical to descriptions of HIV/AIDS including wasting, weight loss, diarrhoea, regular fevers, skin rashes. It is caused either by a man getting estranged from his wife, or when a wife has a breech birth – in which the baby presents legs first. From the data, it appears *chiring pongo* is mostly a condition that affects men. The condition was reported to be incurable unless the wasting man's wife travelled to a village where she was unknown and had sexual intercourse once with a stranger. On returning, she must have sexual intercourse with her husband, who will then begin his restoration to health.

It is important to conduct further research about this condition particularly because it is one cultural space in which norms governing sexual intercourse are broken in order to save one's health. However it is a potentially high-risk custom if the physical wasting is indeed related to HIV because there is the possibility that the wife is also infected and could thus infect the stranger she seeks out, in order to spare her husband. Furthermore, it implicates the diagnosis processes of *marabouts*; how do they distinguish between one suffering from HIV/AIDS and one with *chiring pongo*? Is it possible to tell the two apart? Isn't it possible to mistake one for the other? And if *chiring pongo* is indeed a lay construct of some presentations of HIV/AIDS, wouldn't this be an intervention area where *marabouts* would refer these patients for voluntary



counselling and testing (VCT) to either eradicate or confirm the possibility of HIV infection and then patients could pursue appropriate lifestyle, care and support?

It is important to highlight the multiplicity of interpretations of the HIV/AIDS metaphor in our data. This was not only in the narratives as a collective body of texts, but also within individual narratives. Thus for example one *marabout* could present one understanding of HIV/AIDS and then meander into other different but confirming explanatory constructions of HIV/AIDS and then go off on a tangent very contradictory to his dominant reading. Similarly, it was not uncommon for a *marabout* to say one thing in the group discussions and then contradict himself either in the individual interviews or in practice when consulted by a patient. Time, establishment of relationship and rapport also revealed the multiple layers of meaning embedded within lay appropriations of HIV/AIDS. Rather than deciphering these contradictions as inconsistencies in our analyses, we postulate that the triangulation of multiple research methods enabled our data to capture both the meta-narratives and the subaltern narratives about meanings of HIV/AIDS in the available social cultural milieu of contemporary The Gambia. With a general population HIV prevalence rate of 2.2%, The Gambia is at a pre-epidemic stage and thus Gambians are still grappling with the reality of HIV/AIDS. Perhaps this explains the overt need for denial of HIV/AIDS in their immediate surroundings. However, they are not in isolation of the wider world and as such have variously heard about the catastrophic effects of the epidemic through diffusion, powers of globalization via tentacles of the media, diasporaic connections, etc. The national health policy and programme regarding HIV/AIDS is largely driven by international health politics; thereby infusing the national health frameworks of reference with global prioritising for sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore the dominant biomedical discourse about the virology of HIV/AIDS tends to infiltrate even lay explanatory frameworks. However, these are largely overshadowed by social cultural explanations in the immediate context including issues of promiscuity, witchcraft, a curse from Allah, anger of the ancestors, overt urbanisation and copying of western lifestyles. The



explanatory idioms of the *marabouts* in our study are a lens of understanding wider social cultural interpretations of HIV/AIDS in The Gambia.

### **The role and place of *marabouts* in efforts to combat HIV/AIDS in The Gambia**

As we trudge into the third decade of HIV/AIDS, international health policymakers are engaged in a two-pronged debate about whether or not to include alternative medicine in efforts to combat the epidemic. Some scholars have revealed the strengths within collaborating with traditional healers (Quaye and Kipanda 2003, King 2002, Green 1997).

Due to their ability to influence the decisions and actions of individuals and communities, *marabouts* are key nodal points that can be harnessed in prevention, education, care and support interventions, targeting their social networks. Based on their social status, cultural relevance and religious authority, *marabouts* are well-placed as potential agents of transmitting accurate information, education and communication (IEC) concerning HIV/AIDS. Based on principles of diffusion, trickle down or the ripple effect, the Department of State for Health and Social Welfare (DOSH&SW) should design accurate health education sessions appropriate to the Gambian context and transfer this knowledge to *marabouts* who can be utilised as champions of transmitting it to other members of society. *Marabouts* could also play an important role as collaborators with DOSH&SW in the design of religio-culturally appropriate health education messages embedded within the lay explanatory frameworks of Gambians and specifically targeting prevalent myths and misconceptions surrounding HIV/AIDS. The *marabouts* could perhaps contribute to shaping the messages, choosing appropriate language for discussing sexuality and risky sexual behaviour without alienating the campaigns. Furthermore, *marabouts* could be vectors of relaying this knowledge not only as educators but also as peers or role models.

Since *marabouts* are the first point of call for several ill Gambians, if taught the symptoms of HIV/AIDS, they could also be encouraged to refer patients suspected of HIV infection for VCT. Although they are powerful societal actors who influence individual and collective



decisions or actions, these *marabouts* are also greatly disempowered as active vectors of interventions aimed at prevention, care, and management of HIV/AIDS in their communities because they variously lack accurate information, appropriate skills and effective strategies to tackle this challenge. Thus, while they are socially empowered by the respect accorded them within the Islamic ethos, they are simultaneously disempowered by the mammoth complexities embedded within the reality and metaphor of HIV/AIDS within their midst. As an intervention to curb the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, further capacity-building through appropriate training of *marabouts* could facilitate them to provide advice and pre-test counselling to their clients who may be struggling with the possibility of going for a test. In the event of a positive HIV sero status, *marabouts* could be integrated as complementary post-test counsellors of patients, offering advice and information about positive living, healthy nutrition, safe lifestyle, providing care and support along with other carers.

In addition to spiritual support by way of prayers, charity and encouragement, those *marabouts* who believe that Allah has a cure for all illnesses under the sun, could restore hope in otherwise discouraged people. The belief in the hope for a cure bears perseverance and endurance, similar to acceptance that Allah deems fit the trial by illness in this present life. Thus the *marabouts'* lay model offers comfort to persons living with HIV/AIDS whether Allah heals them or not.

Due to the limited resources in the hospitals to care for intermittently ill patients as is the case with HIV/AIDS sufferers, patient care will inevitably shift back to the families and community (refer to Kathuri in this collection of papers). In The Gambia and other such contexts, *marabouts* have the potential to spearhead community management and care of people living with HIV/AIDS particularly facilitating reintegration and reorientation of patients into the communities (see Burnett et al 1999, Myers et al 1994). By show-casing compassion, acceptance of patients, and observance of equality and human rights of even people living with



HIV/AIDS – as premised within Islam, *marabouts* could lead social movements against discrimination, stigmatisation and segregation against HIV-infected community members.

Those *marabouts* that combine koranic erasures with concoctions from herbs or animal products which either heal or cure or offer some form of relief for particular ailments must be encouraged to continue offering these services. Notably are reports of *marabouts* who do treat diverse opportunistic infections related to HIV/AIDS particularly a skin rash locally called *kuli*, ulcers, diarrhoea, high blood pressure, insomnia, sexually transmitted infections, dementia, tuberculosis, migraines, fevers, etc. Without necessarily discouraging referral for VCT and uptake of anti-retroviral therapy where applicable, *marabouts* can continue offering their treatments for opportunistic infections to HIV-infected patients.

*Marabouts* are among the key social actors who participate in social, cultural and religious ceremonies in their communities. Specifically, they play crucial roles in rites of passage such as circumcision of Muslim boys in infancy as a religious ritual, marriage ceremonies, naming ceremonies, etc. Therefore they are potential ambassadors of safe customary practice through creating awareness about potential HIV transmission via non-sexual routes such as sharing un-disinfected circumcision knives among children whose HIV sero status is unknown, or for blood-letting as therapy, or incisions for medicinal purposes. Rather than totally discouraging religious and customary rituals because of the external labelling as 'harmful traditional practices', *marabouts* could be further empowered through culturally-sensitive education about the dangerous acts that entail exchange of body fluids. Thus, they can create culturally appropriate awareness without necessarily advocating for a total elimination of the entire practice. After all, they are among the social groups that enforce allegiance to customary practice for the sake of establishing identity. Therefore rather than turning against cultural performances in the name of safe behaviour, *marabouts* can spearhead interventions to preserve social, cultural and religious custom but only eliminate possibilities of (re)infection during the process.



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## Errors, flawed evidence, and conflicting interests: Examining publications on female circumcision in The Gambia

### Abstract

Obermeyer (2005,1999) highlights the critical need for scientific research based on rigorous methodology in scholarship of female circumcision.

We reviewed published literature about female circumcision in The Gambia, examining the statistical evidence for a high prevalence rate (80-90%), which is generalised to the entire national female population.

Comparative analysis between 'material as quoted' and 'material in the original studies' reveals obvious errors, flawed evidence, and exaggeration. Authors either wrongly attribute high prevalence rates to authoritative sources such as the scientific research study of the Medical Research Council (MRC), or to unpublished reports written for international organisations such as World Health Organisation (WHO), or to renowned national bodies such as the Women's Bureau. However, the statistics are mainly extrapolated from studies based on small unrepresentative samples, self-reported accounts, anecdotal evidence and speculation.

The assertion that a strong majority of Gambian women are circumcised is an ecological fallacy – not supported by the available research evidence. Erroneous misquoting of scientific evidence fuels sensationalist arguments, and may be criticised as propagating imposition of Western ideals. Anti-female circumcision activists and interventionists must take stock of the errors they circulate, revisit their debates and ground their cause within the evidence and realities of women on the ground. Advocates for and against the practice will be more credible if they correctly appropriate the role of research to back their cause.



### Why examine evidence?

During preliminary presentation of our ethnography of youth sexualities in The Gambia, a major critique highlighted the absence of discussion about female circumcision. Citing Touray (2006) as proof of high prevalence of female circumcision in the country, the interrogator consolidated his argument for the need to systematically consider this practice. Our ethnography was thereby judged incomplete and found wanting.

Because of the interrogator's seniority, long years of experience, and more so his reference to **evidence** of high prevalence of female circumcision within our study setting, we conceded. We returned to the drawing board, and reviewed literature. During this process, we uncovered an error in the critique's main premise. In a bid to ground her work in statistical evidence, Touray (2006) had erred in her citation and interpretations of Morison et al.'s (2001) study.

### The error

Introducing a section entitled 'Female genital mutilation (FGM)', Touray (2006:78) states:

Statistics from different sources in the Gambia have shown that over 80-90 per cent of Gambian women are circumcised. A recent study by the Medical Research Council (MRC) have [*sic*] corroborated this with a prevalence rate of 97 per cent among those examined. The study has shown that a total of 1,157 women consented to gynaecological examination and 58 per cent had signs of genital cutting. The study also revealed that there was a high level of agreement (97 per cent) between reported circumcision status and that found on examination (Morison et al. 2001:643). The children of practicing ethnic groups are particularly vulnerable...



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This evidence has several limitations. Firstly, the sources of the 80-90% majority of circumcision of women are not provided. Why mention statistics without referencing them so that readers can track down, examine and confirm for themselves the validity and basis for this statement?

Secondly (and most critical), the author provides an error as proof corroborating her claims to a high prevalence rate of female circumcision in The Gambia. I variously re-read and examined Morison et al.'s (2001) study from the MRC. I found no evidence of this 97% prevalence rate among women who were examined. Rather Morison et al. (2001:647) report that:

During interviews with a fieldworker 58% (779/1346) reported being circumcised... Of the 1157 women who were examined by a gynaecologist 668 (58%) had signs of genital cutting.

Specific content analysis of page 643 referenced by Touray (2006:78) above reveals either a misrepresentation, misreading, or misinterpretation of a statement in Morison et al.'s (2001) **abstract**<sup>1</sup>. Focusing on the level of agreement between their two distinct sources of data about circumcision, Morison et al. (2001:643, 649) state:

There was a high level of agreement between reported circumcision status and that found on examination (97% agreement).

These are clearly two different issues. Touray (2006) is erroneously using the MRC study to validate her claims of high prevalence of female circumcision among Gambian women. She errs in her citation by replacing '58% of examined women' with '97% of examined women'. This exaggeration is unacceptable in responsible academia.

Thirdly, further compounding the issue is the apparent contradiction in the subsequent sentence where the author then correctly cites the actual prevalence of 58%. Stated side-by-side as they

<sup>1</sup> Is it possible that merely skimming through the abstract and not reading the entire paper, is responsible for this mistake? Or was the author looking for any figure to justify her cause as an activist? Would it have made a difference if Touray had read the results and discussion sections within the main body of the paper?



are in the text, the disagreement between the two statistics is clearly worrisome. It raises serious questions about the review processes and editorial competencies of the IDS Bulletin in which this article appeared. Being so obvious, how could this disjuncture go unnoticed? In addition to being false, it can be appropriated to promote alarmist, emotive and sensationalising debates<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore it is potentially misleading particularly when brandied about by unseasoned academics and those who dogmatically subscribe to statistics as the basis of truth and evidence. Fourthly, by focusing on the high level of agreement between the reported circumcision status and that found on examination, Touray (2006) fails to meaningfully unpack the different layers of nuances of female circumcision within the Gambian context. This weakness is heightened considering her positionality: 1) as an insider (Gambian woman) focusing on the issue, 2) having worked for many years with affected women and men in the relevant communities, 3) as a key player (Director) in a local non-governmental organisation called Gambian Committee on Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP) spearheading anti-female circumcision campaigns, 4) having intervened also at legal level, and 5) as an agent advocating for change, and intervention (Touray 2006:79). Isatou Touray is *the* icon of the anti-female circumcision movement in The Gambia.

Simplistic focus on the majority view also silences the contextual differences between the biomedical construct and the local understandings of female circumcision. And yet, clearly, what female circumcision means in local terms neither necessarily resonates with gynaecologists' interpretations, nor neatly fits into WHO's (1995) classificatory model. When talking about female circumcision, different people mean different things which do not always agree. By

<sup>2</sup> We do not condone abuse or violation of any human being – man, woman, girl, or boy. We do not support the physical torture or suffering of individuals. By raising the issue of numbers here, we are not defending the act if it occurs in smaller numbers than sensationalist reporting claims. The issue here is **evidence** as the basis for science, academic research and scholarship. We had to spend resources unpacking this question because it was reported to be widespread in The Gambia. The published false figures were believed wholesale by an academic examiner. Scholarship is not sensationalism. The errors of activists become established truth, and measures of judging scientific research. Should this vice go unchallenged?



emphasising the biomedical paradigm, Touray fails to harness the potential of her positionality to provide a nuanced understanding of such emic perspectives.

Finally, in the entire paper, she fails to problematise the homogenised version of female circumcision within The Gambian context. This is in spite of her assertion in the introduction that '... many African feminists would agree that "international" prescriptions of what is to be done to work on sexual rights and issues around them – which assume normative power in the contemporary political scene – do not often translate easily into the lived realities of African women. The meanings of sexual rights and issues around sexuality need to be grounded in the real issues of different contexts.' (2006:77) Because it is largely shaped by social cultural factors including ethnicity, religion, access to formal education, and location, the specificities of practising female circumcision differ depending on context. In presenting the different types of cutting operation assessed by their gynaecologist, Morison et al. (2001:647) illustrate a range even within specific WHO classification types. For example listed under WHO's (1995) type II, they found 6% of women had partial clitoridectomy and partial excision of labia minora, 3% had partial clitoridectomy and complete excision of labia minora, 15% had full clitoridectomy and partial excision of labia minora, and 32% had full clitoridectomy and complete excision of labia minora. The four different combinations all fall under type II classification.

### **Flawed evidence**

Realising the need to cautiously approach the statistics flung about by local activists in the struggle to advocate against female circumcision in The Gambia, we hoped to find better rigour among accomplished academic scholars. We expected Western scholars to portray more care and accuracy in sourcing their supporting materials and claims about prevalence rates. However, we found more evidence of sensationalism, flawed evidence, and creative attribution.



In their comparative study between Senegal and The Gambia, Hernlund and Shell-Duncan (2007a:45) state:

Prevalence rates have differed from the outset, as different ethnic groups predominate in the two nations: for example, the Wolof, who largely do not practice FGC [female genital cutting], make up only 16 percent of the Gambian population, but constitute the ethnic majority (43 percent) in Senegal; the Mandinka, who almost universally practice FGC, make up 42 percent of the population in the Gambia and a much smaller proportion in Senegal (less than 19 percent). Consequently, in the Gambia, a strong majority of the population – 80 percent or more – practice FGC (Daffeh, Dumbuya, and Sosseh-Gaye 1999),....

The evidence that Hernlund and Shell-Duncan (2007a) provide above is heavily flawed. Not only is it incomplete, but it also does not 'consequently' arrive at the conclusion of a 'strong majority of the population' that they do. Here, we restrict the review to the Gambian material. If 16% of the population belong to an ethnic group that largely do not practise, and 42% belong to an ethnic group who almost universally practise, SO WHAT? Does this material lead to the authors' claim that a strong majority of the population practise female genital cutting? Given the evidence they provide, is it acceptable to arrive at such an incredulous announcement, and then adding insult onto injury, qualify their unfounded claim with the number '80 percent or more' which they reference to an unpublished situation analysis? How do the numbers that they cite qualify their claims? By referring to an unpublished manuscript by Daffeh, Dumbuya and Sosseh-Gaye (1999), what use are these authors making of this evidence? Is it to justify their flawed majority claim, impress readers about how well-grounded in data their argument is, or dumbfound us with their access to the accounts of localised authors? In fact critical to this interrogation is the



reliability of the data, methods of data collection, and sampling in Daffeh, Dumbuya and Sosseh-Gaye (1999) situation analysis.

Their supporting evidence is incomplete. One would need to know the distribution of other ethnic groups within The Gambia, and the prevalence of female genital cutting within each of these groups, in order to arrive at any meaningful conclusion about prevalence of the practice. These authors do not account for 42% of the Gambian population, and yet they are quick to generalise their discussion. It is interesting that while they apparently had access to Morison et al.'s (2001) study which reports a much lower prevalence, is published after scientific peer review, was based on a rigorous study design, and was released more recently, they do not make any recourse to the statistics therein. Is this perhaps because they suspect that the lower prevalence rate deflates the urgency needed to push their agenda? Since they referenced Morison et al.'s (2001) study, surely they could have used it to provide the range of reported prevalence rates of female genital cutting found within the country.

Further to the point about generalising, one wonders why their findings are generalised to the entire 'The Gambia and Senegal'. In assessing the limited discussion of methods in this paper, the reader establishes that the data are drawn from a 'three-year, mixed-method study in urban and rural Gambia and a number of Senegalese communities near the northern Gambian border, using a team of local fieldworkers...' [page 45]. Specifically, the data 'consisted of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions... participant observation... and community descriptions.' [page 45]. This is a great study design, and ideal triangulation of different data collection methods suited to arriving at rich in-depth contextual data about these specific people studied in this particular space and time. Because the authors do not provide sufficient data about their study population, and sampling criteria, it is difficult to understand why they extrapolate their findings to anything beyond their study setting, or indeed how representative their results



are. The strength of their study design lies in its potential to unpack the multi-layered dimensions (i.e. beyond an overly simplistic dichotomy of supporters and opposers) of negotiating the decision to circumcise a female or not within their study setting. Given the inherent diversity within the country, extrapolating their findings to a wider social group – even the Gambian population – is an ecological fallacy<sup>3</sup>. To do so, calls for a different methodological approach. It may perhaps take their 'second phase of the project [which] will involve a large-scale survey...' [page 56, footnote 1].

### Another misrepresentation of statistics

Further examination reveals another misquotation of the statistics presented by Morison et al. (2001). Hernlund and Shell-Duncan (2007a:46) boldly claim:

Most Gambian women who have undergone circumcision have had WHO type 2, full clitoridectomy and partial excision of the labia minora (Morison et al. 2001).

Cross-checking this evidence from the source uncovers another error, carelessness when handling evidence, and/ or clever misquotation by these same authors. While it is true that Morison et al. (2001:647) state that '...most fell into the WHO type II classification...', there are two major problems with Hernlund and Shell-Duncan's (2007a) presentation above. Firstly, they collapse into one category all the four different signs of genital surgery that Morison and et al. (2001) clarify and spell out. Perhaps it was due to limitations of word count? Had they left their

<sup>3</sup> We employ a nuanced meaning of 'ecological fallacy' to refer to: 1) stereotyping, 2) the expectation that because a bigger percentage of a group do something therefore a random sample from the group will also mostly do it, 3) an error of inference due to failure to distinguish between different levels of organisation, 4) deductions about a small group of individuals on the basis of 'ecological data', 5) inferring about a wider population group from average scores of aggregate data sets. If 80% of a small sample of people who are not randomly selected and thus not representative of a specific study population practice X, does this therefore mean that 80-90% of the total population they belong to also practice X? Does it therefore mean that the majority of another group of people from a different area within this total population also practice X? Does it therefore mean that any individual or groups of individuals from that larger context also practice X? Our point here is that while the inferences may be correct, they are not supported by the data. Furthermore, processes of aggregating and disaggregating data can conceal variations not visible at the aggregate level.



statement at just the 'WHO type 2', it would have been brief, factually correct, and acceptable. However they go ahead to give detail, and err in presenting the specification.

Thus, secondly and more critical to the evidence discussion because it is an error, Hernlund and Shell-Duncan (2007a) refer to the wrong variation when they attempt to highlight which version of WHO type 2 cutting was most common. From Morison et al.'s (2001:647) Table 2, clearly only 15% (176/1157) women had full clitoridectomy and partial excision of labia minora, while 32% (374/1157) women had full clitoridectomy and complete excision of labia minora.

For acclaimed scholars with a diversity of publications on the subject (e.g. Hernlund 2000, 2003, Hernlund and Shell-Duncan 2007b, Hernlund, Shell-Duncan and Wander 2006, Shell-Duncan 2001, Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2000, 2006, 2007), this sloppiness is unacceptable particularly because they are 'experts' charting the paths in female circumcision scholarship. Because activism and advocacy often need compelling evidence to sway opinions, move masses, shift practice and impact policy, the demands for accuracy, rigour, transparency and integrity are even higher for scholarship purported to promote the cause of anti-female genital modification. While some may argue that we are nitty-picking, fault finding and being defensive, those involved in examining the multi-faceted complexities of the female circumcision question realise that the devil is in the details. The gist of the arguments (whichever side one falls) is in the particularities of their given context. Errors in evidence and mediocre academia puncture the wheels, and inhibit momentum in the cause. If the basis for this paper is flawed, how can the readership trust the evidence for the other works these authors have churned out?

Furthermore, because ink is indelible, and scholarship is continuous, others coming after the present generation of academics will read these articles, take the evidence, and run with it to formulate new research questions, studies, and scholarship. The seemingly small errors of carelessness in today's scholarly writing soon become the foundations or building blocks upon



which flawed academia is built. If unchecked, they also unwittingly become the measures against which others are judged, examined and potentially found wanting.

We turn to these very authors, to illustrate how flawed evidence, soon becomes the main reference point for scholarship (see also Obermeyer's 1999 comment about the Hosken reports discussed below). What is striking in their review of Gruenbaum's (2001) book entitled *The female circumcision controversy: an anthropological perspective*, Shell-Duncan and Hernlund (2003:429) refer readers to their own work:

While this chapter offers little for those already familiar with the literature of FGC, it provides information essential for non-experts to understand later chapters focussing on key angles of the controversy. **(Readers who want a more comprehensive and well-referenced introduction may wish to consult Toubia and Izette 1998, or Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2000).**

In this same book review they further state:

Sensationalized and often graphic accounts have fuelled public outrage and motivated political action locally and globally. Yet, often those very women that campaigns intend to help have reacted negatively to what is perceived as insensitive interference from outsiders. Consequently, the task of eliminating FGC has proven complex and impossible to separate from wider, political, cultural and social issues (Shell-Duncan and Hernlund 2003:429).

In their review of the work of others, they reveal that they are evidently very aware of the sensationalism, insensitivity and interference from outsiders, and the politics or poli-tricks involved in the task of eliminating female circumcision. So what justification do they as Outsiders - have for using sensationalist evidence which is basically flawed, with such



effrontery, egotism, self-righteousness and indeed insensitivity? When scrutinised with a measure of similar rigour, would their own work stand the test?

### Unqualified sweeping statements

Among the Mandinka, Serahule, Bamana, and Fula – all groups believed to have migrated to the area from the east – female “circumcision” is nearly universal, although this is also true of the Jola, who are believed to be indigenous to the region.<sup>4</sup> The Wolof, thought to have come from the north, did not practice female “circumcision” in the past, but estimates put the number of Wolof females “circumcised” nowadays at about 30 percent (this figure was widely quoted to me by doctors, activists, and others, but I have been unable to find its source and assume it to be an estimate based on anecdotal evidence). (Hernlund 2000:237)

The above quotation is culled from a brief discussion about origins of female circumcision in The Gambia. It raises two issues relevant to our discussion about evidence. Firstly, as background information to the paper, it is striking that the author makes a statement about near universality of female circumcision among the different ethnic groups listed, without qualifying it. How does she know this? Where did she source it? Is it universally accepted or standard general knowledge? What provisions does she give her readers to assess the validity of her claims? All these questions beg answers.

Secondly, with reference to her description of the Wolof ethnic group, we commend the bracketed explanation about the descriptive statistic of 30% that she presents. In comparison to all the other examples, this is good science because the author provides some evidence in the form of estimates, and goes further to inform the reader about the source of this material. The



author empowers the reader to judge for themselves the reliability of the evidence. It is such transparency, that is crucial to good scholarship.

### **Analysing the source of the '80% or more' prevalence**

Daffeh, Dumbuya and Sosseh-Gaye (1999) are cited above as the reference in support of Hernlund and Shell-Duncan's (2007a) claim that '...in the Gambia a strong majority of the population – 80 percent or more – practice FGC...' Analysis of the source established that this is an unpublished report based on an unrepresentative study sample.

Furthermore, in trying to locate the source of these high majority claims, we found one paragraph that perhaps quotes the different sources. According to Hernlund (2000:237),

Official statistics on the overall frequency of genital cutting in the Gambia vary: local studies, invariably based on extremely small samples, report that 79 percent (Singateh 1985) to 83 percent (*Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice Study*, Women's Bureau of the Gambia 1991) of all Gambian women have undergone some form of genital cutting, whereas others use the Hosken report's estimate of 60 percent (Touray 1993).

The strength of this paragraph is in its ability to contextualise the evidence. Singateh's (1985) study, which is most commonly cited when providing evidence for female circumcision in The Gambia, is correctly described here as having 'extremely small samples'. Shell-Duncan and Hernlund (2000:11) further describe Singateh's (1985) as 'a limited study', which is 'not nationally representative'. They also quote the estimated prevalence of 80% for The Gambia, citing Singateh (1985) as the 'source of prevalence rate'. From the reference list, one establishes that this is grey literature, unpublished, and belonging to Gambia Women's Bureau. The same is true for the Women's Bureau of The Gambia's (1991) study, which belongs to the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit.



Finally, Obermeyer (1999:85, 99) highlights 'the poor quality of evidence', and the methodological shortcomings of the estimations of prevalence of female circumcision within *The Hosken Report* (1982, 1983). Although she reviewed them, she excluded them from her summary in spite of describing them as 'a standard source of information for many writings on the subject', 'extensively cited, and their prevalence figures and "global maps" frequently reproduced'. She further details the issues:

Hosken frequently does not cite her sources, nor does she indicate whether they come from anecdotal evidence, primary case reports, or population-based studies; she mentions responses to letters written to governmental and non-governmental organizations, "field reports" and "hospitals which are the most reliable sources of information" (Hosken 1982:33). In addition, there are numerous methodological shortcomings in her extrapolations from samples to national populations (including simplistic assumptions about the age and sex distribution of the populations), and her calculations of the global estimates of female genital mutilation are flawed as a result. (Obermeyer 1999:99 n9)

Therefore the high prevalence rate of female circumcision in The Gambia is founded upon sample sizes, and research methods that are not nationally representative. The lower prevalence rate provided by Morison et al. (2001) is based upon a rigorous study design, with a randomised sample, and triangulation of both self-reports, and gynaecological examination. Albeit having the limitations of all cross-sectional studies, namely problems of sampling, refusals, being mere data points, and unable to capture variance in setting and changes with time, it is the best statistical evidence available.

### **Separating propaganda from science**

In questioning the logic behind the dubious inflations of figures provided as evidence of high prevalence of female circumcision in The Gambia, our aim is not to thwart the movement of



those engaged in eradicating it. We were genuinely interested in exploring the question in order to inform and improve our research on sexualities of youths in The Gambia. By highlighting the flawed evidence, we are not trivialising the issue, nor supporting violations against women and girls (where they occur). Rather, we hope that we are contributing towards strengthening the basis upon which arguments for or against the practice are made. If evidence and supporting material for an argument are found wanting on scrutiny, then progress is hampered. Arguments based on good-science instead of propaganda, offer better case material.

Our attempts to understand the sources of these inconsistencies within evidence provided to support arguments about female circumcision in The Gambia led us to the historical saga of the anti-female circumcision campaign in the country. It was important for us to locate these authors within the wider Gambian scene because all knowledge is situated. Therefore we examined their positionality and involvement in the social action against female circumcision. Isatou Touray is a member of GAMCOTRAP – the leading NGO at the forefront of activism, advocacy and campaigning<sup>4</sup>. Ylva Hernlund's work in The Gambia was 'made possible' by GAMCOTRAP, conducted in the urban area of Bakau which is also the site of the GAMCOTRAP offices (Hernlund 2000:236), and also comprised participation in the activities of APGWA. She explains:

In 1997-1998 much of my focus was on participant observation with the Association for Promoting Girls' and Women's Advancement in the Gambia (APGWA) during the

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<sup>4</sup> GAMCOTRAP has been at the helm of the movement to eradicate female circumcision in The Gambia. According to Hernlund (2000: 240), 'The Gambian campaigns can be traced back to the mid-1980s, when a small group of urban, educated women, all of whom are to this day involved in work against FGC, began an organized effort to abolish genital cutting. It all started through the Women's Bureau, which represented the Gambia at the 1984 meeting in Dakar organised by the Senegalese government and the Working Group on Traditional Practices (and cosponsored by the World Health Organization, United Nations Children's Fund, and the United Nations Population Fund) at which the Inter-African Committee (IAC) was formed. Due to the perceived need to address FGM separately from the broader goals of the Women's Bureau, the Gambia Committee of the IAC was then created, and then in 1992 its name was changed to Gambian Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting Women and Children (GAMCOTRAP).



Taking our queue from Obermeyer (1999), we questioned 'the known' about female circumcision in The Gambia, and found the evidence for a high national prevalence wanting. Not only is it flawed, but it also contains inaccuracies in interpretation of data. Airirhenbuwa (2007) emphasises the importance of "Questioning the question" - problematising the basis upon which research questions are posited - if solutions that are appropriate, relevant, and in tune with the diverse local realities in Africa are to materialise. Activists and advocates may have reasons to justify exaggeration; the bigger they can paint the problem, the better they can defend their existence and attract more fuel for their cause. Propaganda and sensationalism may be strategies, and therefore integral facets of social action. The most powerful form of advocacy must be informed by good science. Published research must be taken for what it is; in its totality with both its strengths and limitations<sup>5</sup>. Activists must be empowered by scholars and researchers with

<sup>5</sup> Ethnographic studies are powerful tools to uncover the depths of contextual specificities and variations in female circumcision practices. In The Gambian context, variation has been shown among different ethnic groups. A starting point could be comparative ethnographies perhaps among the Mandinka with a near universal prevalence of female circumcision, the Fula who partially practice, and the Wolof among whom only a minority do practice. Although randomised controlled trials are the “gold standard” for monitoring prevalence rates, Obermeyer (2005:445) points out that they are impossible to conduct in the case of socially prescribed customs. Prospective cohort studies would be unethical in case of morbidity going without intervention. Therefore cross-sectional surveys are ideal. Similar to Morison et al.’s (2001) study, these could be combined with hospital examinations by gynaecologists to compare self-reports from women about presence and types of cut. Although difficult to conduct, these researchers prove it can be done. Perhaps it should be extended to other regions of The country – if one were interested in getting national prevalence. The evidence generated from these studies would then be the basis upon which activism and



proper evidence. Researchers' evidence can be utilised to formulate cases for appropriate interventions and activism. Connecting this loop is necessary in order to overcome the emotionalism and back the immense efforts of campaigning or interventions. However academic scholarship and scientific research cannot be founded on errors, flawed evidence, and emotionalism.

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advocacy were hinged. In addition to compelling outsiders, this evidence would resonate with local appreciations and experiences, and therefore make sense to them.



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## ***Appendix 16: List of abbreviations and acronyms***

|           |                                                                                |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ABC       | Abstinence, Be faithful, Use condoms                                           |
| AFPRC     | Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council                                        |
| AGI       | Africa Gender Institute                                                        |
| aob       | any other business                                                             |
| AIDS      | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome                                            |
| CODESRIA  | Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa                       |
| DEMTAP    | Demand for Treatment and Prevention in Malaria Project                         |
| DHT       | Division Health Team                                                           |
| DOSHSW    | Department of State for Health and Social Welfare                              |
| EAC       | East African Community                                                         |
| FF        | Farafenni                                                                      |
| FF-IFP    | Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Programme                           |
| FGD       | Focus group discussion                                                         |
| FP        | Family Planning                                                                |
| GAMCOTRAP | Gambia Committee Against Traditional Practices                                 |
| GAMTEL    | Gambia Telecommunications                                                      |
| HIV       | Human immuno-deficiency virus                                                  |
| HIV-1     | Human immuno-deficiency virus – 1                                              |
| IAC       | International AIDS Conference                                                  |
| ICASA     | International Conference on AIDS and Sexually transmitted Infections in Africa |
| IDI       | In-depth interview                                                             |
| IUD       | Intra uterine device                                                           |
| IFP       | International Fellowship Programme                                             |
| JD        | job description                                                                |



|       |                                                |
|-------|------------------------------------------------|
| KAPs  | Knowledge, Attitude and Practice surveys       |
| LAHS  | Lend A Hand Society                            |
| LGBT  | Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender        |
| LSHTM | London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine |
| MRC   | Medical Research Council                       |
| NCAC  | National Council of Arts and Culture           |
| NGO   | Non-governmental organisation                  |
| NYC   | National Youth Council                         |
| NYSS  | National Youth Services Scheme                 |
| PBUH  | Peace be upon Him                              |
| PLWHA | People Living with HIV and AIDS                |
| PRA   | Participatory Rapid Appraisal                  |
| RHS   | Reproductive Health Services                   |
| RP    | Robert Pool                                    |
| SRH   | Sexual and Reproductive Health                 |
| SRN   | Senior Registered Nurse                        |
| SSRC  | Social Science Research Council                |
| STD   | Sexually transmitted diseases                  |
| STI   | Sexually transmitted infections                |
| SYSS  | Santa Yalla Support Society                    |
| TBAs  | Traditional birth attendants                   |
| UCL   | University College London                      |
| US    | United States                                  |
| VDC   | Village Development Committee                  |



## ***Appendix 17 : Glossary<sup>1</sup>***

*Abaraka bake!* – Thank you very much(*Mandinka*)

*Abbaya* – Long tunic usually worn by men

*Afra* – Fried spicy meat sold on the road in mobile charcoal stoves

*Alkalo* – Village Chief / Head

*Allahu akbar* – God is great (*Arabic*)

*Amin amin* – Amen Amen

*Apparante* – Boy who acts as conductor in public transport, collects fares, lifts goods

*Asubuhi* - Morning, also the name for the early morning prayers

*Attaya* – Chinese green tea

*Bantaba* – Open space in a compound, or village where people meet to chat and relax. Also platform for village forum, or campaign ground.

*Basang* – large mat

*Billahi* – In God's name, used to swear (*Arabic*)

*Binbins* – waist beads worn by women and girls (Name from local music)

*Bismillahi* – In God's name! (*Arabic*)

*Bubu/ Grand Mbubu* – Expansive robes made of African fabric

*Capico* – Colloquial for condoms.

*Carwash* – Euphemism for condoms.

*Ceteris paribus* – All things remaining constant.

*Chagga* – Commercial sex workers. Also used as a label for promiscuous person.

*Cheppeh* – Pretty lady.

*Choof* – Boyfriend ; adjective for charming male partner. (From local music)

*Chuchu* – Widely used euphemism for penis.

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<sup>1</sup> Wolof is the local language, where none is indicated in brackets.



*Churai* - Incense

*Degala* – Exactly – literally: it is true!

*Dalasis* – Gambian currency.

*Ebbeh* – Luxury snack of fried crab, cassava, tomatoes, onions, spices privately sold.

*Femigum* – Word used for female condom.

*Foleh* – Colloquial for condoms.

*Foolane* – Colloquial for condoms.

*Frohk chaya* – Rotten pants (*Fula*). Label for very buggy shorts worn by Fula or Naar.

*Fudan* – Red, brown, black paint made from henna and dye for women's fingers and feet

*Fufu* – Meal of pounded yam.

*Fugojai* – Second hand clothes sold in open markets.

*Gelegele* – Bush taxi

*Gor-jigen* – Man-woman. Label for effeminate men. Can also be derogatory.

*Halak* – Derogatory: slut! Also Arabic for cursed person or thing.

*Hijab* – veil worn by women.

*Imam* – Leader of Islamic prayers

*Imani* – Faith (*Arabic*)

*Jabarr* – Wife

*Jai fondesh* – Big bums – used jokingly.

*Jalijali* – waist-beads worn by women and girls. (Also known as Ida Sukha)

*Jerrengen jef?* – Thank you (pl.)

*Juju* – Magic substance worn or kept as a charm.

*Juma* – Friday communal prayers. Also used to refer to mosque.

*Kawas* – Socks, but also used for condom.

*Kawas whe' ne'* – Slang for condom

*Kkikiriki* – Drugging a drink in order to forcibly have sex with an unconscious girl



*Konko* – Expression called out as one knocks at the door. Also drank aphrodisiac.

*Lumo* – Cyclical market, usually once a week

*Madarassa* – Qur'anic school

*Magal* – Smaller pilgrimages to local Saints in Senegal.

*Magi* – Brand name for powdery spicy block used in food.

*Mbye Faal* – Mouride men who grow dreadlocks, carry a baton, work for the Serigne

*Manddo* – discipline, good behaviour (*Wolof*)

*Marabout* – Islamic spiritual guide or teacher, also given to scriptural healing.

*Muezzin* – Muslim man who publicly summons people to prayer.

*Mzungu* – White man/ woman (*Luganda*)

*Nagis* - Excreta

*Ndimu abasajja abasiru kkumi* – I am worth ten foolish men. (*Luganda*)

*Onjarama nobete!* – Thank you very much! (*Fula*)

*Oustaz* – Islamic leader in a community.

*Pass bi* – Transport fares.

*Purdah* – Keeping women in domestic spaces, with the exception of Friday prayers.

*Raka* – One round of Islamic prayers.

*Ramadhan* – Islamic month of fasting

*Salaam Aleikum* – Peace be with you. (*Arabic*) Used as greeting.

*Shariah* – Islamic law

*Siliimu* – Local label for AIDS in Uganda

*Swallah* - Prayers

*Suma jabarr* – My wife

*Tangana* - Hot

*Tapalapa* – Locally baked fish-shaped bread

*Togal/ togu wanye* – Short wooden stool.



*Toubab* – White man/ woman

*Ulaama* – Muslim scholars

*Umma* – Muslim brotherhood

*Waleikum salaam* – Response to greeting. Meaning ‘Peace be with you too!’ (*Arabic*)

*Zakat* – Giving alms to the poor